DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 319 842 UD 027 446

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TITLE Improving Middle Schools in Boston: A Report on Boston Compact and School District Initiatives.
INSTITUTION State Univ. of New York, Buffalo.
SPONS AGENCY Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Sep 89
NOTE 86p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC04 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Cooperative Education; *Cooperative Programs; Dropout Prevention; Educational Change; Enrichment Activities; *High Risk Students; Intermediate Grades; Junior High Schools; *Middle Schools; *Nontraditional Education; Program Descriptions; *School Business Relationship; Urban Schools; Work Experience Programs
IDENTIFIERS Collaboratives; *Massachusetts (Boston)

ABSTRACT

This report discusses the improvement initiatives in Boston (Massachusetts) middle schools triggered by the work of the Boston Compact to promote education-business collaborations to improve the public schools and provide better job and college-going opportunities for Boston students. Section 1 describes a study that was initiated to learn whether business-sponsored education activities, which originally focused on the high schools, had moved down to the city's middle schools. The following programs are discussed: (1) the Boston Compact; (2) the Compact Ventures Program; (3) the Boston Plan for Excellence; (4) community social service agencies; and (5) the School Department. Section 2 discusses relationships between middle schools and various Boston businesses, and the services and assistance the schools have received through those relationships. Section 3 presents brief case studies of seven middle schools. Section 4 reviews statistical data on change in the schools along the following dimensions for 1984-85 and 1987-88: (1) student achievement; (2) percent of students taking the MAT (Metropolitan Achievement Test); (3) attendance; (4) suspensions from school; and (5) dropout rate. Section 5 considers the middle schools' capacity to implement an improvement agenda that calls for the following changes: (1) strengthen the academic curriculum; (2) increase personal student-adult contact; and (3) produce high expectations for students. Eight figures are included. (JS)

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A Report on Boston Compact and School District Initiatives

by

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and

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State University of New York at Buffalo

September 1989

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Acknowledgements

We are particularly endebted to a number of people whose help was invaluable to this research. Anne Wheelock of the Massachusetts Advocacy Center gave us access to her extensive files, documents, reports and insights on the middle schools. Jo Coro and Mike Taylor of the Boston Private Industry Council were generous in the time they spent with us. Thanks also go to Robert Schwartz, Education Advisor to Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis for his insights on the school system, and to Hayes Mizell of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, who kept a steady stream of helpful documents flowing in our direction.

We are also grateful to several business-school liasons from the business community who shared their partnership experiences with us, and to staff in the middle schools where we conducted this research. We extend special thanks to the middle schools principals: Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr. of the Lewenberg Middle School; Steven Leonard of the Martin Luther King Middle School; Michael Anderson of the Wheatley Middle School; Charles Ray of the Dearborn Middle School; Mary Grassa-O'Neill of the Timilty Middle School; Valerie Lowe of the Mary Curley Middle School; and Robert Martin of the McCormack Middle School

I. Introduction and Background

In June 1987, the Boston Compact celebrated its first five years as a vehicle for promoting education-business collaborations to improve the public schools and provide better job and college-going opportunities for Boston youngsters. The original 1982 Compact agreement between the business community and the school department included measurable objectives against which progress could be assessed. The business community agreed to hire annually increasing numbers of Boston public school students for summer and part-time school-year jobs and permanent jobs after graduation. The school department pledged to reduce both high school absentee and dropout rates by five percent annually and to increase by five percent each year the number of students who either took a job or went on to college. The school department also agreed to raise academic standards in reading and math, so that by 1986, all graduates would meet a minimum level of performance. Finally, the School Department promised to initiate new education improvement programs to help schools meet the Compact goals.

Within two years of the business-education agreement, the Boston Compact expanded to include 25 Boston area colleges and universities that agreed to help the high schools improve curriculum and teaching practices; they also agreed to make more financial aid available to public school graduates. An agreement with the Boston Trades Union Council promised to recruit and accept more Boston graduates into skilled-trade apprentice programs.

In the Compact's first five years, the business community moved far beyond its original job placement goals. 760 companies now provide permanent

and part-time jobs for virtually all students and graduates who want one. In addition, business-school partnerships have generated a good deal of financial support, pro bono assistance, and publicity for individual schools. In 1984, the business community capstoned these initiatives by establishing the Boston Plan for Excellence, an endowed public education fund whose business contributions now total over fifteen million dollars. More recently, some business leaders have become outspoken advocates for reforming district governance, decentralizing authority to schools and increasing school-level accountability.

Progress toward Compact goals has been slower in the school department and the schools. Student achievement and attendance has shown modest improvement in six years; after increasing steadily since 1982, the dropout rate stabilized in 1988. However, the dropout rate did continue to rise for Hispanic students. The district is not given much credit for the changes, which many consider a statistical anomaly. Recent district superintendents have been unable to build enough support for their ideas or convey a sense of leadership or provide a vision for change. Some of this is probably due to turn-over in the superintendency. But resistance to change in the teachers union, the School Department bureaucracy and some of the high schools are probably bigger factors in the district's inability to move. The political contentiousness of Boston and the enormous complexity of trying to build a consensus for serious change of any sort doesn't help matters. Fiscal constraints on reform are also quite real. The current superintendent's plan for broad gauge reforms that would effect virtually everything the district is responsible for, The Boston Education Plan, has been only partially funded. In the meantime, political developments in the district have shifted

attention away from school improvement to restructuring district governance, developing school-choice options and decentralization through school-based management. This is "the national education agenda" as well, so most local public school advocates, except the usual and expected dissenters, are falling in behind it.

We provide this brief overview of the Boston Compact and recent developments in the school department to provide a context for this paper on improvement initiatives in Boston's middle schools. This study was particularly interested to learn whether business-sponsored education activities, which originally focused on the high schools, had moved down to the city's middle schools. And, if so, what effect these partnerships might be having in terms of improving academic and extracurricular programs in the middle schools. We found that the business community was just beginning to form relationships with middle schools, and this paper describes the early stages of those partnerships.

We also looked for other assistance and services provided to middle schools by the Boston Compact, the Boston Plan for Excellence, community social service agencies and the School Department. The Boston Compact is just beginning to focus on middle schools, chiefly through the Boston Private Industry Council's Partnership Program and in proposals to implement the ninth grade Compact Ventures program in middle schools. The program currently operates in ten of the district's fourteen 9-12th grade high schools. A second business initiative, The Boston Plan for Excellence, is a business-sponsored public education fund that provides support to middle schools for academic enrichment and extra curricular sports programs. We found it difficult to track the work of social service agencies with middle schools;

it appears that most services are provided in traditional ways -- through the school department or by school referral to various agencies rather than through partnerships that link schools with a single multi-service agency that consolidates services and relationships.

The second section of this paper discusses relationships between middle schools and various Boston businesses, and the services and assistance the schools have received through those relationships. The section also discusses improvement programs proposed by the school department or initiated by the schools themselves. A third section presents brief case studies of seven middle schools. These describe school-business partnership activities, programs supported by the Plan for Excellence, and new programs initiated by the school department or the school. A fourth section reviews statistical data on change in the schools along several dimensions for two points in time: 1984-85 when the district began to focus on problems in the middle schools, and 1987-88, the most recent year for which data is available. A final section considers the middle schools' capacity to implement an improvement agenda that calls for a stronger academic curriculum, more personal student-adult contact, and high expectations for students.

Method of the Study

Our research began with attempts to locate any and all material that had been written about Boston's middle schools. Finding little beyond the statistical school profiles prepared annually by the Boston School Department, we contacted individuals in Boston education and youth advocacy organizations and began to develop descriptive school profiles. Since our research was chiefly concerned with the role business has played in middle

schools, we selected for closer study seven middle schools that had established functioning partnerships with local businesses.

We learned from local individuals that the reputations of these schools, their innovativeness and entrepreneurial skills, and their academic performance varied considerably. However, a few of the seven were considered to be among the best middle schools in the district. School performance data tended to back up local reports.

Our original study design called for spending one day in each school interviewing several staff members. However there were delays in getting permission for this from the school department, and we subsequently were able to interview only building principals. In addition, we interviewed the business liaison for each partnership as well as staff in the partnership office of the Boston Private Industry Council. Interviews were also conducted with the director of the Boston Higher Education Partnership, individuals from both the public and private sectors who have played key roles in the implementation of the Compact over the past six years, and several individuals from local education advocacy organizations who are knowledgeable about changes in the middle schools over the past several years. Research was conducted during the 1988-89 academic year.

II. Improvement Initiatives in Boston Middle Schools

The Business Community

Nearly all business community participation in the middle schools occurs through the Boston Compact's Partnership Program and through grants from the Plan for Excellence's Hancock Endowment for Academics, Recreation and Teaching (HEART), an endowed fund whose income is earmarked for middle

schools programs. The Charles Hayden Fund in the Plan for Excellence, which supports drop-out prevention programs for students below the tenth grade, has also provided some support for middle schoolers in the past two years.

Boston Compact School-Business Partnerships. The middle schools' partnership program is an extension of the PIC's high school program, which has paired local corporations and schools to work on an agenda they develop together. The high school partnerships generally have focused on introducing students to work -- lectures on specific jobs and careers, business tours, summer jobs for students, and the like. Recently, some partnerships have tried mentoring and tutoring programs; business representatives are also invited to participate on some school management teams, but few do so regularly. Several businesses have painted or redecorated areas of the school building, and most sponsor social events or recognition dinners for teachers and students. As a rule, partnership agenda are quite varied, with the quality of the projects highly dependent on the quality of the working relationship that develops between business and school liaisons.

The PIC's middle schools partnership program began in spring 1988 as an extension of the high school program. The PIC began working with middle schools in response to requests from various quarters: the district superintendent's office, which had proposed middle school partnerships in its multi-million dollar 1987 school reform blueprint; several middle school administrators, who wanted a share of the business community's generosity; and a number of businesses that either lacked a high school partner or whose partnerships had begun to flounder.

Unproductive partnerships had become a particular problem because of vexing organizational and cultural barriers that neither sector seemed able

to overcome. An example mentioned several times was the inflexibility of the high school schedule which frustrated business plans to mentor or tutor or otherwise work with students during the school day. On the school side, some teachers apparently resent and resist partnership activities that intrude on time they feel would be better spent on academics. Some of the partnerships were also running out of ideas for what to do next (people were getting bored with the same menu of award dinners and employee lectures); others began to unravel over feelings that either high schools are not sufficiently appreciative or businesses are arrogant and condescending.

The high school partnerships were also complicated by the district's 1987 decision to require every school to designate a full-time staffer to provide "student support services." Most schools turned that job over to the person who had been the school's development officer, a position first introduced to the high schools in 1983 to orchestrate the Compact's school improvement program. The position had evolved into an executive-assistant-to-the-principal role, which included serving as school liaison with the business partner. When the development officer job disappeared, the partnership was left without its principal choreographer. Teachers were assigned to fill the role on a part-time basis, but too many details began to fall through the cracks. Several partnerships began to languish for lack of attention.

The middle school partnership program was seen as a way to expand the partnership program and deal with problems in the high school pairings. People seemed to think it would be easier for businesses to pair with the lower schools. Partnership management would be less problematic because the liaison role could be handled by school principals, who were not as busy in

the middle schools. Schedules (and teachers) were thought to be more flexible in middle schools and would more easily accommodate business-sponsored activities during the school day. Businesses also liked the idea of working with younger, more responsive youngsters; too many high school students seemed disinterested in what business had to offer, which led them to conclude that interventions at the high school level were "too late" to have much impact on older students.

The PIC began the program in spring 1988 by meeting with middle school principals to talk about what partnerships might entail. It then issued an application that required schools to indicate their "readiness" to participate by providing details about how they would design, manage and facilitate the partnership. They were also asked to present their ideas of partnership activities, which had to address the Compact's goals of improved attendance, school retention, basic skills achievement, career education information and teacher professionalism. The application did not indicate what schools might expect from their business partners, though several principals were hoping for funds to support programs, materials or activities the school needed.

The PIC received completed applications from most of the 22 middle schools; fourteen were approved for pairing. During summer 1988, the PIC held a reception attended by about sixty businesses already involved in the high school partnership program and/or the PIC's summer job program. Businesses that were interested in working with a middle school reviewed the applications, and ten pairings were announced in fall 1988.

As of spring 1989, the middle schools partnerships were still in the early stages, with partners learning how to work with each other as they

worked on a program agenda. The PIC provided some technical assistance, usually speakers who talked about how to get certain kinds of activities off the ground. According to PIC, school, and business staff, progress has been slow, in part because it has been difficult to design an agenda that simultaneously addresses Compact goals, responds to the school's preferences for what it would like to do and also taps the resources that the businesses are able and willing to give.

Mentoring and tutoring programs are being discussed by some partners; on the other hand, schools have not yet received the financial assistance some had hoped for. Business has helped with career education lectures and company tours, but because job and career choices are several years down the road for 6th to 8th graders, businesses have been unable to provide jobs or the focused career information that interests older students, or recruit potential employees for the company. Since middle schools are amenable to only some of the activities that work with the high schools, the partnerships have had some difficulty finding a clear focus. Section III of this report presents an overview of partnerships plans and activities in seven middle schools.

The Compact Ventures Program. Compact Ventures is a drop-out prevention program initiated by the Boston PIC and now operating with district support in ten of the district's fourteen high schools. It is also being pilot tested with a one million dollar federal grant in an elementary and middle school to test its effectiveness as a K-12 dropout program.

Compact Ventures restructures the ninth grade into small clusters of students who take core academic courses together and are taught by a team of academic teachers. Students also get extra remedial help and extensive work

with career education curricula. The notion behind the Compact Ventures program is that junior high school students do not cope well with the large, impersonal, and traditionally organized high schools, and as a consequence, many become overwhelmed and alienated, and leave school for reasons that are preventable. Compact Ventures boasts a significant reduction in 9th grade dropouts among its students, but data at the high school level indicates that some Compact Ventures students are dropping out in the 11th and 12th grades.

In addition to the federally sponsored trial of Compact Ventures in an elementary and middle school, the school department has applied for state drop-out prevention funds to support the expansion of Compact Ventures to all of the high schools. The state and a local advocacy organization, Massachusetts Advocacy Center, have raised questions about the application and about Compact Ventures on the grounds that neither address school structural issues and district policies that are widely believed to exacerbate Boston's dropout problem, attendance and promotion policies chief among them.

Mass. Advocacy in particular argues that the district's dropout prevention efforts below the 9th grade, where 40% of 16 year olds dropped out in 1987-88, are too few in number and serve but a small fraction of the middle grades population.[1] In addition, Compact Ventures serves only 15% of the district's Hispanic students, though their dropout rate is 54% or 14 points above the rate for the system as a whole. Moreover, the effectiveness of Compact Ventures is challenged by the state department of education, which argues that nearly 25% of all ninth grade students were retained in grade in 1988, despite the program's operation in all of the regular, non-exam high schools. According to the state, "the high failure rates,

especially at the ninth grade, require more than add-on programs. Restructuring of relationships and redesign of routine policies and practices affecting the entire school, particularly the ninth grade, should begin immediately." [2]

The Boston Plan for Excellence. This endowed public education fund was established by the Boston business community in 1984 and now manages gifts in access of $15 million to support individual schools, teachers and students in the Boston Public Schools. The Plan consists of seven programs, five of which have been permanently endowed by businesses and two that have been funded by multi-year grants from the Public Education Fund and from the Charles Hayden Foundation. A $1 million endowed fund from the John Hancock Insurance Company is earmarked to support middle schools, while the Hayden Foundation grant supports dropout prevention programs for students in the 10th grade and below.

The Hancock Endowment for Academics, Recreation and Teaching (HEART) funds school-initiated projects in the two areas of basic skills instruction and intramural athletics. Since its first funding cycle in 1986, HEART has awarded 36 academic grants and 63 athletics grants, the former averaging about $3 thousand per grant and the latter $4 thousand. The Plan does not provide data on awards to individual schools. However, data on the city's five community districts indicates that more grants are received by districts whose middle schools are in the poorest parts of the city than those in neighborhoods with a larger number of working and middle class families. By the same token, a review of both successful and unsuccessful proposals on a school by school basis indicates that schools known to be the

strongest in the district are more successful in winning HEART support than are those with weak reputations and performance.

Foundation guidelines for the HEART academic grants indicate a preference for proposals designed to improve basic skills acquisition, particularly for students at risk of failure, dropping out, or serious underachievement. The guidelines suggest that schools try something new: develop new curricula or teaching methods, try academic enrichment in non-school settings or tutoring by adults and older students. Most of the successful applicants, however, propose to improve academic performance in familiar ways; in addition, a sizeable number of grants are made to support the expansion of school projects that are already underway. The Fund also has made a number of grants that support materials acquisition -- math manipulatives, classroom-based libraries, and computer software. The number of awards for book purchases suggests that the fund is allocating substantial support for materials that will be used to supplement the single basal reading series that the superintendent introduced to the district, over considerable principal and staff dissent, over a year ago.

Most schools did not propose projects that were genuinely creative or innovative. Few proposed to experiment with new teaching methods, staff configurations or creative curricula. Some of this is probably due to district requirements that teachers follow district curricula, and by the district testing program, which encourages teaching to the test rather than experimenting with innovative approaches. The absence of any significant staff development activity in Boston may also explain the lack of inventiveness in school proposals. Whatever the reason, the HEART academic grants largely are supporting conventional teaching and learning approaches,

many of which have been found to be only marginally effective in improving the achievement of at-risk students. There is no official follow-up data available which could indicate the success or failure of the HEART programs. Principals report that the grants help them to provide otherwise impossible-to-fund recreation programs. Sources in Boston say, however, that some of the academic grants result in simple purchases of supplies and equipment and not in innovative teaching strategies or curriculum offerings.

The HEART athletic fund is being used to replace the district intramural athletic program that was dismantled in budget cuts several years ago. In the interim, middle schools have been able to offer only inter-scholastic athletics, which has sharply limited student participation in sports programs. HEART athletic grants come with few guidelines; schools are encouraged to develop whatever athletic programs they want, though participation is reserved for students who meet the academic and attendance requirements set by the district.

For the past four years, schools have spent funds to support teacher stipends, equipment and awards for such sports as volley-ball, hand-ball and basketball. The Plan funded most proposals it received, nearly twice the number of academic proposals. During the coming funding cycle, however, schools will be asked to definitely link the academic and athletic programs, tying participation in sports to attendance and grade level achievement, and perhaps requiring student signed contracts to ensure improved performance. The Plan would also like to link intramurals to writing and reading projects in the hopes of using the grants to stimulate more attention to academic work.

HEART guidelines have been sufficiently broad to permit schools to propose virtually any reasonable academic or athletic activity. As a consequence, the fund has supported a varied brew of programs and approaches, has supported a modest mix of staff development activities, and has encouraged, in effect, a hundred flowers to bloom in the middle schools.

This may be a sensible approach for the use of HEART funds for the time being; management in the school district is unstable and the administration's agenda for improving curriculum and instruction is unclear. But as the only endowed program in Boston that is exclusively aimed at middle schools, HEART has the necessary financial and political leverage and support from people in schools to provide leadership in designing a creative and coherent agenda for middle school reform in the city. The Plan for Excellence has decided not to act on this opportunity, partly because the district's agenda is unclear and staff believe the district should take the lead, and partly because business has been reluctant to become involved in district curricular and instructional issues. But stability in the district's administration could be a long time coming. In the meantime, HEART resources and leadership could be used more effectively to help set a course for the middle schools without intruding on district prerogatives.

A second fund in the Plan for Excellence, the Charles Hayden Foundation's three year $150,000 grant awarded in 1987, provides services for at risk students below the tenth grade. During its first year, the grant was used to support the academic component of the Summer Training and Education Program (STEP) developed by Public/Private Ventures, Inc. The program served 210 students in transition between the 8th and 9th grades. In summer 1989, Hayden funds will be used to support a collaborative venture with a local

summer residential Outward Bound program, the Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center, and Teens as Community Resources, Inc., an organization that places teens in community service projects. The fund will support 40 students entering 8th and 9th grades, who will participate in the Outward Bound program, work in community service projects, and meet monthly throughout the summer and school year with local college students serving in a kind of "big brother"/counselor role.

Both projects are commendable. Early national studies of the STEP program indicate significant student improvement in test scores and school attendance. The Hayden Project, though as yet untried in its present form, seems promising if the projects provide opportunities for responsible community work, and if counselors and students are thoughtfully matched and have enough contact to develop helping relationships. Reportedly, few Hispanic students seek to enroll in this program because of neighborhood cultural factors. The major limitation of the projects is the very small number of middle school students it can serve: in 1989, 40 students from a middle schools enrollment of nearly 13,000 students. Considering that 1,762 middle school students were absent from school one day a week on average in 1987-88, it's clear that such programs must expand or multiply considerably to begin to meet the needs of early adolescents in the city.

District Initiatives

The superintendent's agenda for district reform, the 480 item Boston Eduction Plan approved by the School Committee in summer 1987, includes a discussion of middle school problems and recommendations for dealing with them. The Plan cites as the major middle school problems the high number of at-risk students enrolled and the lack of programs that respond to

adolescents' "developmental needs;" difficulty in scheduling remedial classes because required courses fill the day; few extra curricular activities; and few schools with unique and attractive "programmatic themes" that increase their holding power.

The superintendent's response to these problems called for establishing promotion and graduation standards from grades 1, 5, and 8 based on minimum competencies demonstrated in reading. He also proposed establishing Project Promise in the middle schools, a remedial program requiring after school and Saturday morning instruction. The superintendent went on to recommend, without being specific, that middle school schedules be made more flexible and that each middle school develop a programmatic theme in addition to offering a "solid" academic program.[3]

Thus far, two of the recommendations have been implemented. The school committee approved proposals to promote students on the basis of reading test results last year. That policy officially goes into effect in 1990 despite considerable public and professional objection that the new promotion standards were unnecessarily narrow and would result in widespread retention, which is highly correlated with early school leaving. The effects of the new promotion policy are being closely watched.

The second enacted recommendation called for establishing Project Promise, a middle grades remediation program that the superintendent had implemented with apparent success in his previous position. Project Promise called for after-school and Saturday remediation by teachers selected from among district-wide applicants to staff the schools. Students receiving this extra help are regular education and modified special education students. The program involved the waiver of seniority and a few other union contract

rights and gave principals considerably more discretion than the district usually allows. The Boston Teachers Union grieved the proposed project, but for the most part, the district prevailed.

Project Promise was pilot tested in 1986-87 in three middle schools, including the Timilty School which is profiled in Section II of this report. Year-end test results were generally mixed, with each side to the argument claiming victory. According to a district press release, average reading achievement scores on the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) in the three pilot schools "either surpassed the average scores in the 19 other middle schools, caught up with the average, or reduced their gap." But critics argued that the gains were misleading because the same test form was used both years and teachers had become familiar with it and that the remediation efforts could only be measured in the test-taking population. According to the Massachusetts Advocacy Center "the best Boston can claim for its extended day program in middle schools is that some scores improve in some subjects in some grades in some schools. This is flimsy evidence on which to base an extended-time program for at-risk students."[4]

Project Promise continued in the three schools during the 1987-88 school year, and the administration planned to implement it the following year in the other 19 middle schools. But the Boston mayor's refusal to meet district budget requests for 1989 led to a $500 thousand reduction in Project Promise's budget. During 1988-89, the project continued only in the Timilty Middle School, whose principal continues to be enthusiastic about it. However, most educators in Boston were pleased with administration's decision to scale back the program. The evidence on Project Promise's effectiveness

remains murky. But opposition to the program from local educators and the teachers' union likely doomed it regardless of what the data might have said.

Individual School Initiatives

Most improvement programs in the middle schools have been initiated by building principals who developed a well-focused program theme, skillfully packaged it, and sold it to teachers, business partners and others whose support could help the school. The themes usually had an academic focus, such as reading or math improvement, which could be addressed in multiple ways.

The themes in several schools reflected the principals' special interest or expertise; often they had been developing those themes for some time, trying different curriculum, technology, and teaching approaches and carrying the lessons learned from one school assignment to the next. These principals were skilled in managing district politics and increasing their control over such matters as teacher assignments to the school. Their commitment to staffing the schools with the best teachers they could find was perhaps the single most important objective for most of the principals.

The innovations these principals presided over varied considerably, but most involved curriculum and the school schedule. Several had reorganized their school schedules to allow student clustering and teacher teaming, an arrangement advocated by many national middle schools educators and popularized in Boston by the Compact Ventures Program. Others were implementing several schedules simultaneously, or variations on a single master schedule. Although teachers were frequently scheduled for joint planning time, there were few signs of team teaching in the schools. Some principals felt it was pointless to push team teaching without significant staff development assistance from the district. In the next section of this

report. Our snapshots of seven middle schools show a range of improvement actitivies, the academic and structural problems they address, and roles that principals play to keep the school visible to the public, receptive to outside resources, and moving forward.

III. Snapshots of Seven Boston Middle Schools

The 22 middle schools in Boston vary greatly in size, in the ways they are organized and managed, in the amount of leadership the principals provide, and in the severity of their students' family and academic problems. The schools also vary in the links they've established with community and business organizations, in the amount of media attention and district and state awards they receive. The attendance, suspension, promotion and dropout rates also vary. And the schools have developed different approaches for improving student learning, teaching practice and dealing with the developmental issues of young adolescents.

We include the following snapshots of seven middle schools to illustrate how different the middle schools are from one another, and how they have tried to harness and combine internal and external resources to introduce change to the schools. The snapshots have a common format. They begin with a description of the school, its neighborhood, and staff and students working there. Snapshots then discuss school organization and goals, work with business partners, and projects funded by the Plan for the Excellence HEART program. Some school and student performance data is also included but Section IV of the report provides statistical data in greater detail.

A. The Mary Curley Middle School

Jamaica Plain is a changing neighborhood on the west side of Boston. A once strong, middle class residential neighborhood is now a mixture of poverty and middle class mobility. This neighborhood serves as "home" to much of Boston's higher level civil servants and politicians as well as the growing Hispanic population. Sources in Boston worry about the increasing gang violence and drug traffic which has plagued Jamaica Plain in recent years. That worry is quite evident in the work of the staff of the Mary Curley Middle School, which is located on the main thoroughfare of the neighborhood. On the outside the school shows the normal wear of any building built in the 1940's: the brick is worn, some windows are broken and the sidewalks are dangerously uneven. The front lawn of the school is penned in with iron picket-fencing, an obvious deterrent to littering and destruction. On the inside the age of the building is shown in chipping plaster, dim lighting and uneven heat. The classrooms are equipped with uniform desks and chairs and usable bulletin and blackboards.

The Curley serves 756 students; 56% of these students are Hispanic, 33% are Black, 10% are White and 2% are Asian. 160 students are classified as special ed students and 66 of these students are classified as "substantially separate special education students" who attend classes in a self-contained setting. 217 students are enrolled in the school's bilingual program. This program is aimed at helping students develop the language skills which are necessary for success in the general mono-lingual program. During the past two years, an average of 38% of the bilingual students were able to spend more than 40% of their school day in regular, mainstreamed classrooms. 77% of the student body take the district's mandated tests, the

Metropolitan Achievement Tests in Reading and Mathematics. In 1988 Curley students in grades 6, 7 and 8, scored in the 48th, 35th and 39th percentiles in Reading and the 65th, 37th, 29th percentiles in Mathematics. These scores are lower than the scores reported when Curley students scored on the average in the 48th percentile in Reading and the 47th percentile in Math.

The scores have historically been lower for Hispanic and Black students at the Curley than they have been for White students. Not ironically, district statistics also point to the fact that the number of suspensions for Hispanic and Black students is eight times that of the White students at the Curley. The school's promotion rate in 1988 was 91.1%. This latter statistic is based on the number of students who are at the Curley at the end of the year; in 1988 alone 121 students enrolled sometime during the year and never stayed at the Curley. "The transient population is a real problem for us and for this neighborhood," according to one staff member.

Valeria Lowe has been the principal at the Curley for seven years. She is a soft-spoken, articulate woman who claims that the major problems facing her students are: low self-esteem, lack of role models, poor family situations, increasing availability of drugs, gang violence, and little understanding of the belief that 'knowledge can be power'. In light of these problems, Lowe has initiated several programs--some of which have won national acclaim--in an effort to create a school environment where students have all the necessary support to learn and to develop the desire to stay in school. These programs have developed through the use of a volunteer faculty-staff steering committee which meets bi-weekly after school hours to study school problems and special programs.

Lowe works with two assistant principals and one director of instruction. The director of instruction in the middle schools holds the same rank and salary level as an assistant principal. However, the director of instruction is usually freed of operational tasks in the school in order to work directly with the principal and teachers in curriculum development and instructional supervision projects. Many times the director of instruction works closely with a teacher-on-assignment, known as the instructional support teacher, in order to develop customized, school-level programs which are specifically centered on some aspect of improvement of instruction. Lowe has two instructional support teachers who are working on curriculum projects. In addition to these administrative team members, the Curley professional staff includes 38 regular education teachers, 10 bilingual teachers, 10 special education teachers and 5 Chapter I teachers. Other professionals on the staff include one full-time and one part-time guidance counselor, one full-time librarian and a part-time school nurse. Support staff include 11 paraprofessional, teacher aides, 2 full-time secretaries and 1 part-time secretary, 6 custodians, 9 cafeteria workers and 1 school policeman. Sources indicate that this staff was badly scarred by the tensions of the mid-70's when the desegregation orders went into effect in the district; these tensions can be easily observed today in the presence of the steering committee where issues are raised by various racial groups as opposed to interest groups and where an outside facilitator has been hired to help the group work together. The presence of the outside facilitator seems to free Lowe to deal with substantive issues for school improvement with her teachers.

Love has been instrumental in implementing Project Promote at the Curley School. This program has included extended school hours for at-risk students and the development of a network of social agencies to collaborate in meeting students' broader needs for counseling, health-related services and tutoring.

School Organization and Goals. Love created a cluster schedule at the Curley. She has worked with her staff to develop early detection of students who are struggling in reading and mathematics. These students at any grade level are placed in smaller classes where their progress is closely followed. This same strategy is used with bilingual students whom Love would like to see "fully mainstreamed" by the time they leave the Curley. This goal has been criticized by some sources in Boston which claim that the "proposed ideal of mainstreaming" has created a deep division between the mono-lingual and bilingual staff members at the school. Love emphasizes that she believes that every student is "at-risk" in some way during the middle school years and through the collaborative efforts with private and public agencies in the community, she reinforces this message to her staff who are all able to access the services of the agencies.

Teachers at the Curley are scheduled by cluster and most have some free time each day within the cluster to work together. According to Love, "this is the best way in which problems which students are having can be identified--when the teachers get together and talk about what is going on in their classes." The fact that at least 20 of her staff attend cluster meetings and also volunteer to serve on the school's planning committee may be a good indicator that teachers have "bought into" Love's philosophy and yet the same phenomena could be interpreted as a tool for teachers to have a powerful avenue to voice concerns in general about their work at the Curley.

Lowe's goals for the Curley are rooted in her belief that the school must be recognized as a "living part of the community" before it can really be a successful place for learning. She hopes to increase parent involvement through a special program for parents to enroll in GED classes at the school. She hopes to send a strong anti-drug and anti-gang message to her students by developing student information programs in collaboration with the neighborhood social service agencies. She enlists the help of student teachers and mental health interns each year from local colleges as a way to increase her personnel power in addressing student needs. These interns actually work under the auspices of city and state social service agencies which have requested and received space and time in the Curley schedule to work with some of the school's most troubled youth. She has developed a "good neighbor" program through which her students perform service projects at various locations throughout the immediate Jamaica Plain neighborhood. She welcomes any special opportunity for her students; i.e. annual school assemblies sponsored by the Boston Ballet and developed specifically for the Curley, and Project Commitment, a small program sponsored by a local Black judge which exposes students in the steps of the legal process. Lowe participates in the "broader field of education" by studying at the Harvard Graduate School of Education's Principals' Center herself and by offering the Curley as a site for Boston University's study on the implementation of effective schools policies in the Boston middle schools.

Business and Social Service Collaboration. The New England Baptist Hospital is the official business partner for the Curley. The hospital "doesn't have much money to give us but they have resources which we need--people" says Lowe. The partnership is just one year old and while the

hospital's representative is welcome to attend the school's planning committee meetings where she is a member, she rarely does due to hospital responsibilities and scheduling problems. Lowe sees the hospital facing a scary shortage of qualified workers in the near future and she hopes that through the partnership, some of her students will begin to become aware of the hospital as a "neighbor and perhaps, a future employer."

Lowe hopes that the hospital receives the same sense of neighborliness from its involvement in the school's activities. Lowe cited an early-April day when hospital and school employees helped repaint and refurbish the school's main foyer. This day actually "became a community event," involving parents, teachers, students and employees of the hospital working together. Many Curley staff commented on the new look in the school's foyer as a real lift to school pride and a "feeling of belonging to the New England Baptist." In a school where intangibles--good and bad--seem to motivate staff, the foyer can hardly be overlooked as a small donation.

The Boston Plan for Excellence. Curley has received HEART monies for the past three years to support its recreational and athletics program. The school staff is especially happy for this money because otherwise there would be no funds for the school's popular intramural program which Lowe claims over 325 kids attend. In addition the school has received HEART academic grants for special reading and mathematics programs developed through the Project Promote program during the past three years. Each of these latter grants has covered some costs for staff development which has allowed teachers to customize the reading and mathematics curriculum to student needs and to, generally, update teaching methodology through attendance at workshops and the help of hired consultants. An interesting feature about

Curley's HEART proposals has been the statements of rationale which clearly indicate that curriculum development and staff improvement is motivated by the staff's desire to see student test scores improve. The proposal-writers are quick to point out the grade inflation found in the test reports, which include the scores of advanced students calculated with the overwhelming number of students who are testing below grade level.

Business and Other Collaboration. Finally, Curley was chosen in 1988 as a site for the installation of an IBM Integrated Learning System which allows for individual remediation of students through computer-assisted instruction. Twenty-five computers connected to the system have been installed throughout the school to be used by individual students working on reading and math drills.

Curley is also connected to several collaborative efforts within the neighborhood, through the use of resources allocated to the planning team by Northeast Regional Education Lab and through a recently funded federal project for dropout prevention. Each of these projects "fund activities which foster group participation in developing school and community-wide drop-out prevention programs" according to Lowe. The school's action team basically serves as the school-based management group for each of the projects. Lowe simply shifts the funds into various projects through the decisions made by the action team. For example, the action team has developed a program to provide tutoring and counseling to the at-risk students at a feeder grade school and at the high school in Jamaica Plain and a plan for crisis intervention for the seventh graders; each of these projects represents an expenditure of funds from various sources granting resources to the school because of the site-based action committee.

It is difficult to isolate each individual project which is underway in the school. Sources in Boston report that there are many "projects happening at the Curley but that the effects are difficult to monitor because of the overwhelming racial tensions within the school." While this tension is evident through observation of the action team, there is a tangible spirit of concern for at risk students within the school.

B. The Dearborn School

Travelling through the streets the Black and Hispanic neighborhoods of the Roxbury section of Boston close to the Dearborn Middle School, gives the visitor a good glimpse of the poverty which students at this school experience. The streets are lined with boarded-up storefronts and decayed housing; sidewalks are littered with broken glass and garbage and obviously unemployed young and old people wander the streets. This is an area with a high crime rate, where even taxi drivers refuse to go. The Dearborn school is hidden in a blighted area off of Roxbury's main streets. This area, now largely Hispanic, was once a strong middle class Irish then Jewish, neighborhood and the school, now a graffitied building under constant guard by a school policeman, was once a prestigious district academy for girls from within and beyond the neighborhood.

Inside the building are signs of its age and disrepair. And yet the warmth and liveliness of middle school students who attend the Dearborn dispels any visitor's notion that this school is just one more sad part of the neighborhood. Teachers and students seem very comfortable as they pass through the halls; all is quiet after class bells ring.

The Dearborn serves 360 students; 67% of the students are Black, 23% are White, 9% are Hispanic and 1% are Asian. Since the school is the designated school for Portuguese-speaking students--largely descendants of Porte Verdians who have emigrated to work in Boston's fishing industries, the school operates a substantial bilingual program. 135 students, 35%, are enrolled in bilingual programs, 165, 48%, are enrolled in regular education programs and 60, 17%, are enrolled in special education classes. Some of the special education students are also bilingual making this is one of the few Boston schools with multi-lingual special education classes. 48% of the students take the Metropolitan Achievement Tests; their scores for grades 6, 7 and 8--57, 50 and 43 in Reading and 49, 48 8and 36 in Math, respectively, in 1988 ranked the school fifth highest in the field of twenty-two middle schools. These scores show a decline when compared to the scores reported in 1985 when Dearborn students scored on an average in the 53rd percentile in reading and the 53rd percentile in math. In spite of generally good scores, the overall promotion rate at the Dearborn is only 83%. This difference can be accounted for by the high retention and poor attendance rates of bilingual and special education students.

The principal for the Dearborn, Charlie Ray, is a soft-spoken man nearing retirement. He has served in the district as a teacher, coach and most notably, as an assistant principal during the strife-torn, mid-1970's in one of Boston's toughest high schools. These experiences seem to have mellowed Ray who is visibly tired, yet dedicated as a school administrator. He speaks openly about the problems that politics have created in the city schools. And, he knows the problems which his students face: "they grow up in unbelievably unstable environments, where school is the only consistent

thing they know." Ray wants to operate a school that gives kids a sense of belonging but thinks that is virtually impossible because of the cross-town busing which pulls kids away from their neighborhoods. Under these circumstances, Ray is a pragmatist. He says, "I take the resources which I have and try to work each year to help kids learn."

The Dearborn's staff of professionals includes an assistant principal, a director of instruction, an instructional support teacher, 17 regular education teachers, 12 special education teachers, 8 bilingual education teachers, 3 Chapter I reading teachers, 1 full-time guidance counselor and 1 part-time school nurse. In addition Ray has 6 teacher aides, 2 full-time and 2 part-time custodians, and 5 cafeteria workers all of whom he values "as much as his teachers". The aging physical plant has created some serious problems for Ray in his tenure as principal and he admits that if his maintenance staff is transferred, he will "be ready to retire."

School Organization and Goals. Ray's goals for the Dearborn are simple: to improve students' performance on the district tests and to prepare them to succeed in the future by giving them sense of accomplishment in their middle school years. "A traditional schedule is the best way to deliver instruction," according to Ray and, therefore, he has maintained a strict eight-period day for all regular education classes. The bilingual and special education schedules are built on the cluster model so that students can be moved from class-to-class according to need and achievement. There is no plan for common teacher preparation-time in the schedule. In a sense there are two differently structured schools operating at the Dearborn; one traditional schedule for regular education and a more monitored, flexible

schedule for bilingual or special education. There is minimal mainstreaming of special and bilingual students in the regular education program.

Ray reported that 18 regular education students took the exam schools test in 1988 and that 12 were admitted to these schools (Boston Latin School, Boston Latin Academy and Boston Technical High School). He is proud of this number and believes that it is a result of a program built around "mastering the basics of reading, writing and mathematics."

Business and other Collaborations. The official business partner for the Dearborn is the Federal Reserve Bank. This partnership was begun in the spring of 1988. The liaison at the bank, Lillian Seay, the Director of Community Affairs, reported that since the bank, by law, cannot give funds, "it is very interested in sharing human resources with the Dearborn." Ray is happy for any support which he receives from the bank in this regard. He has strongly supported the bank's mentoring initiative which sends 25 bank employees to the school once a month to meet with students as mentors. "The nature of these mentoring relationships," according to Seay, "is as varied as the employees and the students are. Some meet and just talk, some have tutoring sessions and some simply do not work out. On the other hand, some mentors have ended up having two or three students come share the time talking."

Seay transports the volunteers via a bank-operated van to the school for the monthly visit and she asks them to follow-up at least one other time during the month with a phone call, note or second visit to the student. Seay believes that more mentors and tutors could become involved in the program if there was greater organization at the school level. The school liaison, the director of instruction, who is also a doctoral student at Harvard's Graduate

School of Education, "has a huge amount of responsibility" according to both Ray and Seay and so sometimes, he is unable to follow-up on scheduled meetings with the bank people who are seeking new ways to establish partnership ties with the school. Nevertheless, Seay, who has been seasoned in partnership experience through her earlier work as the liaison to the South Boston High School, believes that the mentor program can work. She sees the strength for the program lying in the excitement which both students and mentors express after only one year of contact. She says, "eyes are opened on both sides and even if one mentor helps one kid to realize the importance of education, it will be a successful program."

Seay's belief in the value of singular experiences is mirrored by Ray in his statements about other school-community and school-business collaborative efforts. "I will accept any offer from outside organizations so that my students will experience a wide-range of opportunities," says Ray. Sources in Boston report that he does just that. He is proud to be the adopted school of the Roxbury Community College Shakespeare Group; for the past five years the group has provided special drama instruction and performances to Dearborn students. Additionally, he accepts tutors from the Regis College teacher education program to work with his sixth grade Hispanic students. Tutors from Boston College's teacher education program help his eighth grade students prepare for the exam school tests. He has participated in many programs offered by the Private Industry Council to develop attendance and achievement incentive programs. He welcomes speakers to address students on various issues through a special speaker-in-the-school program sponsored for the last five years by the Boston Herald, the school's neighbor.

Ray has some "teachers who have spread the computer-buff bug" and, therefore, he welcomed the offer of Bank Street College in 1986 to pilot a special integrated learning project at his school. This project provided computer training for his teachers and resulted in the development of a cross-curriculum learning project for students.

The Boston Plan for Excellence. The computer project with Bank Street College was later funded by a HEART academic grant in 1987--88. The HEART funds have also been granted to the Dearborn since 1986 to support the after-school recreation and intramural sports programs. Ray is especially proud of the newly-developed karate club which now has a waiting list of students. The recreation funds have been used to support the "traditional sports" of basketball, track and volleyball but each year, Ray and his director of instruction try to find another area of student interest to fund. For example, two years ago, the school bought ping pong equipment and now that sport has become a popular, year-round activity for students. Students are able to participate in the programs if they maintain a C average and if they attend school for 85% of the school year.

Like other middle school principals, Ray reports that the HEART monies have been the only means through which any afterschool programs can be funded for sports. He estimates that at least 50% of his students participate in HEART-sponsored activities sometime throughout the school year and that those who do participate "begin to contribute to a positive social climate in the school."

C. The King Middle School

The King Middle School is hidden in a decaying residential section of Dorchester, Boston's oldest settlement and, now, one of its poorest neighborhoods. The school's exterior largely reflects the blight of the area with its graffitied walls, broken fences, and sidewalks littered with broken glass. In one corner of the face of the school building, there is a vibrant logo of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the map of Africa, superimposed on the map of the United States. This contrast is easily mirrored inside the building where poorly lit halls reveal chipped plaster and old paint--a dim environment in contrast to the high energy and warmth of the students who seem very comfortable in their school. The King is a poor school facility in a poor neighborhood and it serves some of Boston's poorest middle school students.

490 students attend the King; 50% are Black, 25% are Hispanic, 12% are White and 1% are Asian. 24% of the student population is classified for special education. Sixth graders comprise 50% of the school's population since the King offers one of the few district Advanced Preparation classes for sixth graders with strong academic potential. This special class is maintained at the King as a means of successfully integrating the school. In spite of the presence of these students, the King's students on the whole score in the lower half of all middle school children in the Boston Public Schools who take the Metropolitan Reading and Math Tests. In 1988 the scores at the King were reported for grades 6--8 respectively as 54%, 35% and 34% in reading and 68%, 39% and 34% in math. These scores represent 76% of the students. The overall promotion rate at the King in 1988 was 79.8%. Earlier scores for 1985 show that there has been a decline in test scores at

the King; the 1985 scores for grades 6--8 respectively were 66%, 38% and 48% in reading and 62%, 42% and 44% in math. In 1985 64% of the students enrolled at the King took the tests and the school promotion rate was 66%.

These low test scores, the poor physical plant, the low socio-economic status of the students and a history of transient principals paints a depressing picture of the King. However, when Steve Leonard, former assistant principal in one of the city's academic high schools became the principal two years ago, he used these negative features as challenges for a plan of overall school improvement. Initially, Leonard, who is an intense, seriously committed man, formed a steering committee of teachers, staff, parents, community leaders and a businessman to help him assess the needs of the school and to develop a proposal for a Carnegie Schools Grant. These competitive grants were offered to schools in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with promising plans for school improvement to be implemented in 1988--89.

The steering committee won "its first vote of confidence" according to Leonard, when the King was designated as one of seven schools in the state to receive a grant. The grant, originally promised at $50,000 was cut to $30,000 in September 1989 when the state budget cuts were made suddenly by Governor Dukakis and the legislature. Nevertheless, the grant designation brought more to the King than much-needed funds for the school year. Because it was a Carnegie school, the principal and staff were freed from any state and local restrictions regarding the organizational structure of the school and the delivery of instruction. Therefore, the designation actually gave Leonard the freedom to experiment with any aspect of the troubled middle school which he chose.

School Organization and Goals. Leonard's goal is "to make the King one of the best middle schools in the Boston system and to do this by utilizing the philosophy of non-violence which was advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr." To this end, Leonard has arduously continued to lead his steering committee in an effort to broaden the base of decision-making within the school community. Ideally, he hopes for a day when he, as principal, will "not be necessary, except as a counselor and advisor to his staff"; he would like to see the power in his school shift equally between administrators and teachers since he feels that "schools become better when people feel like they have made a difference in how the school is operated."

In addition to working with his steering committee and now several ad hoc committees which have grown from the steering committee, Leonard has changed the school schedule so that teachers and students meet in clusters. His goal here is two-fold: he feels that students learn better when their needs are met by a team of teachers and that teachers do better work when they are given an opportunity to meet with their peers regularly to discuss all facets of the instructional program. The teachers have reported that they are happy to have time scheduled into their workday when they can communicate professionally with each other and make the necessary referrals of students to school counselors and administrators for extra attention.

In a small way Leonard believes that the scheduled cluster preparation time for teachers helps to break down traditional teacher isolation and builds a sense of professionalism. In the absence of a strong, district-sponsored staff development program--a fact that Leonard and others in the city deplore, Leonard invites his teachers to use the group planning time to write proposals for special projects and plan possible staff development

programs which he hopes to later fund with Carnegie money--or the receipts from candy sales to students.

Leonard's administrative staff consists of himself, one assistant principal and one director of instruction. The director of instruction is continually working with his teaching staff to develop improved classroom instruction. Leonard has assigned his instructional support teacher to work closely with the director of instruction in order to give emphasis to his goals of improving student achievement. The King's professional staff also includes 28 regular education teachers, 10 special education teachers, 4 bilingual education teachers, 2 bilingual special education teachers, 2 Chapter I teachers, 1 guidance counselor and a part-time school nurse. The professional staff is assisted by 1 school secretary, 1 library aide, 3 teacher aides, 3 custodians, and 1 school policeman. Leonard knows that the most important ingredient in school improvement is the improvement of his teachers' repertoire of teaching skills. He sees teaching as a profession which requires continual updating both in content and methodology. "I believe that every teacher is perfectible," says Leonard; he is obviously very proud of staff currently at the King, which he lauds for effort and dedication.

The Boston Plan for Excellence. During the past three years the King has received HEART monies to fund the intramural middle schools athletic programs which were cut from the district budget in 1985. The King's proposal for funds for the 1989-90 year to design new curriculum plans in reading and math, was turned down without explanation. Leonard hopes that the Boston Foundation did not deny the proposal because of the school's Carnegie grant since "the reason we have applied for both grants is because we desperately need money to support school programs."

Business Collaboration. The school's official business partner is the Shawmut Bank. Leonard works closely with the Director of Human and Community Resources at the Shawmut, Maurice Wright. Wright and Leonard met informally in 1987 and formed a partnership alone out of what Wright terms, "a common commitment to the improvement of the Boston middle schools." Wright was the former director of METCO, a program which enables Boston minority students to attend school in over a dozen suburban districts. Therefore, Wright calls himself a "banker with an education background." This background clearly shows in Wright's articulation of the problems and hopes for the King. Wright and Leonard agreed early on in their discussions, that the partnership should be a mutual one which offers benefits both to the school and to the bank. Leonard would like the experience to provide "bank people with a better understanding of schools' problems." Wright would like the school to receive the benefits of human resource training and efficient management strategies as a central reward of the partnership.

Wright initially "sold" his idea of the partnership to the Shawmut president by explaining that the middle school was really the last "reachable level in terms of impressing students with a sense that they would be the future workers and business clientele in the Boston community." Instead of providing funds to meet a materials wish-list that the school might provide, Leonard asked the Bank to allow Wright to serve as an advisor/member to the school's steering committee. Wright has served in this capacity throughout the partnership and has brought some Bank resources to the King already: the steering committee meets at the Bank where refreshments are served and staff members are given an opportunity "to feel special because they are given a chance to deal with the school's problems outside of

the school environment which often creates interruptions." (Wright) Wright has also proposed that school staff members be invited to participate in group decision-making training offered to Bank employees and that Bank and school staff begin to meet about job-related curriculum concerns. These two proposals will be addressed by the steering committee for the coming school year. Wright is not adverse to allocating bank funds for school projects; he has freedom to allocate sums up to $1,000--anything beyond that would require executive approval from more high-ranking bank officials. He has allocated funds for school incentives for special student projects.

Wright would like the bank to help develop a strong sense of the importance of school in young people's minds. This has been the focus of his work with ten mentors who are now visiting about 25 students on a bi-weekly basis at the King. He believes that mentoring can work for some students but that that is not the only way that the bank and school can share human resources. Ideally, he hopes that the bank employees involved in any level of the partnership will have "their eyes opened to the real problems in the Boston middle schools." Wright accents this hope with his plan to accompany the bank's president on a tour of the King in the coming school year. "I'm sure that he will be shocked just at the physical conditions of the school and this should help him to understand the school problems better," said Wright.

The partnership between the Shawmut Bank and the King seems promising. Both Wright and Leonard share a commitment to the mutual nature of the partnership and, yet, they represent two very different cultures--education/school and business/bank which ironically, could be very dependent upon each other for success in the next decade in Boston.

D. The Solomon Lavenberg Middle School

The Lewenberg Middle School is located in Mattapan, a section of Boston whose social archeology began with middle class Catholics in the early part of this century, moved on to middle class Jews during the Depression, and beginning in the early 1960's began its shift to what is now a predominantly poor and working-poor Black community. Mattapan has the great advantages of good housing stock and a location along Boston's famous "Emerald Necklace", public parks that run for miles along Jamaica Way recreational ponds. As a consequence, Mattapan recently has begun to attract growing numbers of urban professionals, including a substantial number of Boston's Black, middle class citizens, who are now a small but significant force for neighborhood revitalization.

The Lewenberg Middle School is a circa 1920 construction in sad exterior repair but with immaculate grounds, young trees and small gardens ready for spring planting--an annual parent-teacher-student project supported by contributions from neighborhood stores and businesses. The building's classic interior needs extensive renovation, but is newly painted, again the result of parent efforts.

The Lewenberg Middle School enrolls 485 students in grades 6--8, 21% of whom are white with the 79% balance largely black with a small number of Southeast Asians. 32% of the students receive special education services, so that the schools' official achievement test data reflects the performance of 68% of the students at the most. As in the case of most Boston schools, 60% of Lewenberg's youngsters are bused to school.

The school's principal is Thomas P. O'Neill, Jr., a forty year old ball of energy and fierce advocate for his school. A native of Boston, O'Neill's

work for the system includes ten years teaching in junior highs and a year spent in the district office designing a writing program before his assignment to the Lewenberg five years ago. He is one of ex-superintendent Robert Spillane's "whiz kid" principals who were appointed to replace nearly half the system's secondary principals removed for being ineffective. In April 1989, O'Neill was named one of 10 American heroes in Education by the Readers' Digest Foundation, an award that resulted in a $10 thousand stipend for the school.

O'Neill is assisted by one assistant principal and one director of instruction. The director of instruction at the Lewenberg is assigned exclusively to teacher evaluation and curriculum development projects. The professional teaching staff is comprised of 20 regular education teachers, 7 special education teachers, 6 bilingual education teachers, 1 Chapter I teacher and an instructional support teacher. Other professional staff include 1 full-time and 1 part-time guidance counselor, a part-time nurse, a part-time school psychologist and a part-time speech therapist. One major variation in staffing at the Lewenberg, compared to the other middle schools, is the presence of a full-time child psychotherapist who administers the school's special education cluster program for students with sever emotional and learning disabilities. Support staff at the Lewenberg numbers 16; this includes 1 school secretary, 3 custodians, 6 teacher aides, 5 cafeteria workers and 1 school policeman. Like other Boston schools, the Lewenberg has an unusually large number of non-teaching professional personnel.

When we arrived at the school, O'Neill ushered us into the auditorium, where five Lewenberg students who had won ribbons at the Massachusetts State 4-H Fair were preparing to repeat their presentations for the entire 7th

grade. Lewenberg was the only Boston school to participate in the Fair, and the winners included two white students, two black students and one Asian student. The 7th grade audience was attentive and asked questions, but most striking was the atmosphere of respect and congeniality among students. Only three staff members oversaw this congregation, including O'Neill, who patted many heads and shoulders and knew many names.

Lewenberg is widely reported to be one of Boston's best middle schools. In 1987--88, it was ranked #1 among all the city's schools in average student performance on the Metropolitan Achievement Tests: percentile scores in reading for grades 6--8 were 67%, 53% and 55% respectively. In math the scores were 71%, 30% and 34%, for the same grades. These represented mixed results in student performance when compared to the data reported for 1984--85 when the scores were: 66%, 70% and 62% respectively in reading and 36%, 52% and 70% in math. Average attendance was reported at 90%, virtually unchanged from the two previous years. A total of 73 students were suspended in 1987--88, of which 75% were black, 18% white and 7% Hispanic. 94% of the total student population was promoted in 1987--88.

School Organization and Goals. Lewenberg is one of a small number of middle schools that has reorganized classes around the cluster model popularized in Boston by the 9th grade Compact Ventures program. Lewenberg's three clusters are organized as schools-within-the-school, each including a single grade level of about 160 students, 13 teachers and a full-time administrator. The chief difference between this cluster approach and traditional junior high arrangements is the concurrent operation of three different cluster schedules in the school, teacher design of the schedule, and the requirement that academic subject teachers arrange the schedule to

permit them to meet together at least three times a week. Teacher interaction on substantive matter is high as a consequence of this arrangement, but teachers do not team teach. O'Neill says that his staff "desperately needs staff development" to move to that level of collaborative work.

Providing individual attention to average students is reportedly high on O'Neill's agenda, particularly since 32% of the students receive unusual services through special and bilingual education. He and his faculty do this mainly by "trying to generate a feeling that academics are important, which we do through awards ceremonies across subjects and by calling parents when their kids are doing well." O'Neill reports that if the school has any single overriding focus, it is reading, which receives major attention. At the same time he reports that remedial help for problem readers is only available through Chapter 1 and after school work with teachers. "We really don't have the resources to provide other help with skills; we mainly try to convince kids to read more."

By the same token, there are few in-school resources available for helping students with personal or behavior problems. Like all Boston schools, Lewenberg has access to community social service agencies through the two school counselors. But teachers provide most of the individual supports for students, and staff vary in the extent to which they provide this support. As a consequence, O'Neill views the recruitment of caring, competent teachers as his most important task, although he admits to a limited control over new teacher selection.

<u>The Boston Plan for Excellence</u>. Lewenberg has annually applied for, and won academic and athletic grants from the Boston Plan for Excellence's HEART

Middle School Program. For the past four years, the school has received annual grants ranging from $3,200 to $5,000 to support intramural sports, with funds used chiefly to pay for teacher/coach stipends and athletic equipment. The school has also received three awards for HEART academic projects, all which have focused on writing. In 1984--85, the school received $9,200 which was earmarked for materials to supplement those used in the school's integrated writing and language arts program in which all students participate. The following year, an award of $5,800 was used to purchase books, software and a computer printer for use in the language arts program. In 1987--88, the school received $7,000 of which two-thirds was to be used for staff development in language arts and the balance for materials to integrate language arts into all areas of the curriculum. The school's request for 1989--90 for yet additional writing program support was turned down by the Plan's distribution committee for unknown reasons.

According to O'Neill, HEART is "terrific. It has allowed us to do things we couldn't otherwise do: video, props for plays, teacher stipends for after school work and in-house publications."

Business Collaboration. In fall 1988, the school acquired IBM as a business partner through the Boston Private Industry Council's program that was extended down to the middle schools that year. According to O'Neill, the partnership is in its "infancy. We're just getting to know each other." IBM apparently asked to work with the Lewenberg School based on what some employees had heard about the school. Their work together began when O'Neill asked the company for people who could "make a difference" by tutoring or working with youngsters.

At present four IBM employees participate in the school's reading program, where community residents (including the original Mr. Lawenberg's grandson and Boston School Superintendent Laval Wilson, on occasion) come to read aloud at the start and end of each school day. In addition, the Lawenberg is one of the Massachusetts schools selected by IBM to pilot test a substance abuse software program on a new "target" touch screen computer. O'Neill says that the partnership is also useful because "it is important for the school's image to be connected to so prestigious a firm. It helps people think that the school is good." Down the road, O'Neill hopes the school will provide cash resources. But mostly, he wants IBM to convey the message that school is important, that what students do now is important, that having the right attitude, dress and speech is important. These are the things teachers can't convey because kids know them too well. But talk from IBM just might make the difference."

E. <u>The McCormack School</u>

The McCormack School, built in the 1960's, is located between South Boston and Dorchester, in a neighborhood known as Columbia Point, for many years home of Boston's largest and most distressed high rise public housing project. This neighborhood has been notorious in the last two decades for a high rate of violent crime and resistance to court-ordered busing. However, during the past three years, the area has been undergoing a definite change. The Columbia Point Housing Project has been partially demolished, new housing is being built, and old housing is being renovated in an effort to "save the area". What is actually occurring could very well be a gentrification process since new and restored housing sells at prices which are well-beyond

the buying power of the current, poor residents. Nevertheless, the neighborhood is changing and sources say that this could have either a positive or negative influence on the school.

Compared to other aging middle schools in the Boston system, the McCormack is a new building. Built circa 1965, the structure is easily maintained. There are no armored doors, the brick exterior is clean and the sidewalks are in good repair. Since it is located away from the residential section of the neighborhood it is not subjected to constant littering and vandalism. The interior is spacious and bright. The staff here hardly has to contend with the annoying facilities problems which plague the older middle schools.

612 students attend the McCormack. 50% are White, 27% are Hispanic, 25% are Black and 5% are Cambodian/Vietnamese. The building was easily renovated to allow total accessibility to the severely handicapped students in the district. Therefore, the school houses a special program for the severest handicapped middle school students in the district. About 9-14 students participate in this program each year from throughout Boston. 50 other special education students attend the school as well. The school has an extensive bilingual program which serves 125 students and also an advanced work class for high achievers which enrolls 50 sixth graders. 53 teachers work at the McCormack along with the principal, Bob Martin and his director of instruction and assistant principal. 8 additional staff members work as support personnel.

The variety of programs at the McCormack is "exciting" according to the 40 year-old Martin who has been a school administrator in the Boston system since 1981. Martin "loves the special kids" and believes that they add a

specialness to the environment at the McCormack because regular education students have an opportunity to interact with them and "realize how lucky they are to have all their faculties." Martin claims that students at the middle school level need discipline and support so that they can develop the "self-esteem which they are not getting at home or in their communities." He feels successful because of his students' improvement on the Metropolitan tests and because he sees more and more students becoming involved in school-related projects." In 1988 72% of his students in grades 6, 7 and 8 took the Metropolitan tests and scored in the 60th, 39th and 38th percentiles in reading and the 62nd, 38th and 45th percentiles in mathematics, respectively. These scores ranked his school fourth in the field of twenty-two middle schools. The promotion rate at the McCormack in 1988 was 88%. This is an increase of 8% over the last reported promotion rate given for 1985 as 80%. In 1985 students at the McCormack scored on the average in the 45th percentile in reading and in the 50th percentile in math.

Attendance has been a serious problem for Martin to tackle; 67% of his students do not meet the attendance requirement of an 85% daily attendance. In 1985 only 29% did not meet the district requirement.

School Organization and Goals. Martin has maintained a cluster schedule for all grades and for the special and bilingual classes; he believes that this "allows the maximum opportunity for students to be placed in classes which best meet their needs." Although some sources in Boston indicate that tight tracking in the school has resulted in very little cross-socialization within the school's diverse student population, Martin encourages teachers to move students in and out of clusters because of instructional or discipline reasons. He hopes that teachers use common free time to discuss student

concerns but he does not monitor that free time in any way. His overall goal is to make the McCormack a place where kids can learn" and he is happy with the current results of their learning. He uses his guidance counselor "extensively" to mobilize community resources for assisting students with special problems which could require counseling or the delivery of other social welfare services. Essentially, his counselors and teachers use the same services provided to each school through guidance counselors' initiative in contacting the city's Department of Social Services.

Martin has mobilized a large staff to address the diverse educational needs of his students. He is assisted by 1 assistant principal and 1 director of instruction. He has 1 instructional support teacher whom he assigns to work on special curricular projects with his director of instruction. While Martin maintains an autonomous leadership style which is highlighted by high visibility to his students and teachers, he says that he "relies heavily on the talents of his staff to achieve school goals." This professional staff includes 31 regular education teachers, 10 special education teachers, 6 bilingual education teachers, 1 librarian, 1 fullt-ime and 1 part-time guidance counselors, 4 Chapter I teachers and a part-time school nurse. In addition, his support staff includes 5 teacher aides, 1 school policeman, 6 cafeteria workers and 7 custodians.

The Boston Plan for Excellence. Martin has applied for, and received HEART recreation grants which have supported the school's recreation and sports program for the past three years. These monies have been used specifically to bolster the after-school recreation program operated with community agencies in Columbia Point. The Columbia Point Neighborhood Association has helped Martin to allocate the HEART monies to after-school

recreation programs which are coordinated around a special late-bus schedule. This allows all McCormack students to participate in the programs if they meet the attendance and achievement requirements. Although the McCormack receives a great deal of community and neighborhood support from other agencies and the Bank of Boston, Martin feels that the HEART monies are essential to the operation of a good intramural program.

Business and other Collaboratives. The McCormack has been the fortunate recipient of major financial gifts from businesses in the Columbia Point peninsula. The Bank of Boston, which was the first donor to the Boston Plan for Excellence in 1985, has a huge training complex in the school's neighborhood. It donated over $750,000 for the renovation of the school's yard and playgrounds. Martin served on several community committees a few years ago when the "talk about resurrecting Columbia Point was just talk." He basically built ties with important people in the businesses and industries in the area and "tried to make them realize that the McCormack was an important piece of the neighborhood." Evidently, his work was convincing because the Bank agreed to be the school's official business-partner. Sources in the school district office believe that the bank became involved in the McCormack School because it had reaped so much positive PR from its other school partnerships that it was willing to cultivate new initiatives as a part of the entire involvement in the Columbia Point renovation. Martin admits that "the McCormack was simply in the right place at the right time as the recipient of the Bank's massive support."

Regardless of the motivation, the partnership is working on several levels. The Bank executives have linked the principal to other executives in business in the area who have been helpful to the school in advising facility

renovations. The Bank has paid for the installation of the school's IBM integrated learning system computers; the computers were obtained on a grant from IBM. Martin believes that the school received the computers because of their association with the Bank's computer training director who deals directly with IBM.

In addition to financial support, 100 bank employees regularly visit the McCormack to tutor students and to help as assistants in the school's computer lab. Teachers are currently being trained in the use of special computer software at the Bank's training center. Martin says that this has helped the teachers to accept the partnership idea because "they enjoy the different and comfortable surroundings of the Bank." Other bank-sponsored activities include attendance-incentive program whereby students with perfect monthly attendance are invited to a special tour of the Bank's computer center and a special lunch in the Bank's cafeteria. According to Martin, "there are no closed doors for partnerships here at the McCormack; we continually try out new ideas with the bank and they are very receptive."

Added to the association with the Bank, an association which is envied by many other middle school principals, Martin has the further good fortune to be located in an area with several outstanding cultural institutions. The nearby John F.Kennedy Archives and Kennedy Library have offered training to McCormack students as guides and volunteers. The McCormack in return has invited several of the senior volunteers at the archives and the library to come to the McCormack as students in afterschool computer classes. Now some of those senior citizens regularly come into the school to tutor students. Martin says, "Adolescents are the most compassionate kids; they just need an opportunity to explore this part of themselves and that's what this program

does. We've seen some very interesting, close relationships develop between the kids and the seniors." The McCormack students have also been a part of randomly organized neighborhood clean-up operations which have won the attention of Senator Edward Kennedy who attended an awards ceremony to honor the McCormack students' service last year.

The McCormack teachers have been a part of the University of Massachusetts' staff development program for several years. This program which is actually a part of the university's response to the court's order for university involvement in school improvement, has given teachers an "opportunity to improve their skills through special programs which are not available through the school district," according to Martin. The program has also allowed the McCormack teachers to customize their staff development programs and this has resulted in seminars about group decision-making, sensitivity training, cross-cultural learning and problem-solving in a multi-racial workplace.

The McCormack is truly the "blessed child" in terms of its good fortune as a recipient of business and community support. Boston sources don't recognize it as an exemplary school though. Stories of faculty tensions, high suspension rates and poor achievement are common when questions are asked in the community about the McCormack. The optimism of the principal, the good physical plant and the large amount of business support needs to be assessed more completely through a study of the school climate and the rate of learning at the school.

F. The James P. Timilty School

The Timilty Middle School is located in a desolate block of Roxbury, Boston's Black and increasingly Hispanic section of town. While some Bostonians predict that this area will be the next scene of gentrification, today it is a familiar scene of urban desolation. The building probably constructed in the 1940's or '50's stands on the edge of what Principal Mary Grassa-O'Neill describes as the "poorest area in all of Boston." But, there is hardly a sense of desolation on the inside of the building though where walls are covered with student work and where the main offices have been newly painted. 450 middle school students attend the Timilty. 52% of these students are Black, 30% are Hispanic, 10% are White and 8% are Asian. Socio-economically, according to the principal, these students are drawn from the very lowest poverty level in the city population. 80% of the students take the district-mandated Metropolitan Achievement Tests and in 1988 the scores for grades 6, 7 and 8 were 62, 50 and 53, in Reading and 74, 48 and 54 in Math, respectively. This placed the Timilty second among the twenty-two middle schools in the district. This is a direct contrast to the 1984--85 scores from the Timilty when students were scoring anywhere from the 26th to the 45th percentiles in both areas.

The Timilty is Superintendent Laval Wilson's special project, designed in 1985 to serve as a model middle school for Boston students and teachers. Wilson introduced the school to a model, Project Promise, that he had developed and used successfully in his previous tenure as the superintendent in Rochester, New York. "Project Promise" which aimed to improve instruction and improve student learning through an extended school day and extended school week program. Wilson decided to introduce this program to the Timilty

because of its poor status as a middle school, but also because his appointee, Principal Mary Grassa-O'Neill was, willing to implement the project in spite of intensive union and political opposition to a design requirement that enabled the principal to completely re-staff her school as she chose, regardless of teacher seniority rights.

In order to fully understand the Timilty today, it's important to know a little bit about how Project Promise was implemented. Grassa-O'Neill knew that all the teachers at the Timilty prior to the implementation of Project Promise in the 1987--88 school year were not able or willing to accept the increased expectations which the project would make of teachers. The commitment to the longer school day and school week would be rewarded in salary adjustments but the full implementation of the program involved team teaching, team curriculum development and teacher involvement in decision-making at every level of program implementation. In short, Grassa-O'Neill said that the project called for teachers who were ready for full "professional responsibility or--teacher empowerment." The district granted her permission to hire openly within the system and so she announced at the end of the 1985 school year that all teaching positions at the Timilty were open for application. The Boston Teachers' Union eventually took the district to court on this issue and when school opened in fall, Grassa-O'Neill had fourteen classroom teacher vacancies. "Clearly, we were off to a very difficult start but we had decided that having a strong, committed faculty was the only way that the project would work. Now, in the third year of Project Promise, we know that we were right. We have excellent teachers and that has been what has made things work successfully."

During the first year Grassa-O'Neill worked the long hours with her faculty; she arranged training in group work and curriculum development. The district paid for summer curriculum workshops where the newly selected Timilty teachers developed interdisciplinary lessons geared to improving students' overall academic achievement. Grassa-O'Neill reports today that these long hours and continual staff development work have welded together a very committed energetic faculty which has a 96% attendance rate, well above that of most Boston middle schools.

The goals of Project Promise are to help below average students to move to the average range, to enable average students to achieve in the above-average range and to assist those in the above-average range to excel. Grassa-O'Neill reported that the most dramatic gains in achievement have been made by those students who enter the Timilty with below average ability.

By adding an additional 90 minutes of instruction to each day and three hours of instruction on Saturday mornings to the traditional school week, students have greater exposure to the restructured interdisciplinary curriculum. This extended schoolday has also allowed for built-in teacher preparation times where teachers can develop team-teaching strategies which enhance the interdisciplinary instruction.

The current overall student attendance rate of 91% and the promotion rate of close to 96% are figures which verify that Project Promise must have some tangible meaning to the 450 students who attend the Timilty.

School Organization and Goals. Mary Grassa-O'Neill is an instructional leader and, yet, her comments about working with teachers on issues of decision-making and group communication, indicate that she is also a talented manager. She understands her students and her teachers and she promotes

excellence in education at the Timilty by respecting her teachers and demanding their best professional work. Yet, she does not simply demand performance; she meets weekly with teachers in each cluster and tries to provide the structural support necessary for their effectiveness as teachers. She has scheduled students according to clusters and moves her special ed students and bilingual students in and out of regular education classrooms whenever possible. She has scheduled common time for each team of teachers to meet each day and on one day a week, she arranges and early dismissal for students so that teachers can work together as a total faculty on school-wide concerns. "I make each teacher responsible for his own classroom and each team responsible for the activities within the cluster--the teachers make all the decisions now and unless I have some major reason, I rarely disagree with them."

Grassa-O'Neill does not have any more staff members than the average number found in other Boston middle schools. She has 1 assistant principal and 1 director of instruction. Her director of instruction works very closely with her instructional support teacher and the teaching staff to monitor the delivery of the school's interdisciplinary curriculum. Her teaching staff includes 30 regular education teachers, 7 bilinigual teachers, 4 special education teachers and 5 Chapter I teachers. One full-time guidance counselor, one part-time guidance counselor and one part-time school nurse complement the Timilty's professional staff. The support staff at the Timilty includes 2 secretaries, 4 custodians, 4 cafeteria workers, 2 part-time parent coordinators and 1 school policeman. "Everyone is required to be professional here; the extra time is not volunteer work and people are paid to do their work," says Grassa-O'Neill. The belief which she has in her

faculty and the data which shows student improvement objectively suggests that she is a successful principal.

The Boston Plan for Excellence. Beyond this official partnership, the Timilty staff has applied for and received HEART monies for its sports and recreation program. Grassa-O'Neill sees these funds as essential given the "ever-increasing cutbacks in the middle schools." In the 1989--90 school year HEART monies totalling $9500 will be given to the school to support student publications and an interdisciplinary reading program. The monies have been used to help defray the costs of publishing student newspapers and literary collections.

Business and other Collaboration. Like most Boston schools, the staff of the Timilty relies on the guidance counselor to provide a link to community services for students with special counseling needs. Grassa-O'Neill claims that many of her students come from "extremely troubled situations and they could use counseling"; the school relies on the city's department of social services for that counseling help. The delivery of these services seems to be sporadic if anything throughout the system.

When the Private Industry Council began to offer assistance in developing middle school business partnerships in the spring of 1988, Grassa-O'Neill and her staff quickly responded with a request for a partner. The prospect of a business partner was initially thrilling to Grassa-O'Neill until she discovered that the partner for the Timilty was a nonprofit agency, the Massachusetts General Hospital. She openly says, "We wanted a rich business partner because we have so many good ideas here which can't go anywhere without some additional money."

There were some real problems initially with the partnership announcement. The Black teachers at the Timilty did not want the hospital to initiate some type of career program in the school which would advocate low-level jobs for minority kids to consider as future employment. Grassa-O'Neill didn't know if the partnership would be worth the effort if the school didn't get some money; she was also unsure about the scatter-shot approach to project development which the hospital liaisons had suggested. The hospital liaison, Tom Marcussen, had proposed a curriculum development project which the school staff found to be idealistic and unrealistic. Nevertheless, the principal and hospital liaison met and after four hours of conversation, "we decided that we were compatible" according to the Marcussen.

Since that meeting several things have transpired throughout this past school year that have led Grassa-O'Neill to proclaim that "the hospital is probably the best partner we could have after all." Marcussen came to the school and met with the faculty to discuss the needs which the hospital might help to address. The hospital decided that it could help by providing medical and research personnel to help students perform science fair projects, a clinical psychologist to help the school counselor in an advisory capacity and a possible staff development workshop on child and adolescent psychology for the school's teachers. The school is still unclear how it will be able to reciprocate with to the hospital. In talking with Marcussen about the partnership it is easy to sense his excitement about what has occurred; he is very concerned that students have the opportunity to realize that Massachusetts General is a "part of their city--they need to know all the things that we do here." Behind Marcussen's words is the agenda: he

hopes that exposure to the hospital will eventually mean that students will begin to consider careers in health care at some level. Like many of Boston's businesses, the hospital which is the city's second largest employer, is at a crisis point because of a high number of unfilled entry-level positions in low-paying departments. This concern may weave itself into a career program somewhere down the road at the Timilty.

The Timilty is a well-loved school. Principals in other schools mention Project Promise with admiration but more often, community sources and principals credit Mary Grassa-O'Neill, as the prime mover who took the initiative to make Project Promise work at a time when the school could have easily continued in its downward trends of increasing suspensions, poor attendance and poor test scores.

G. <u>The Wheatley School</u>

The Wheatley School is located in the former Horace Mann School for the Deaf, a beautiful school building constructed around 1930 when aesthetic beauty was important to school design. The exterior is worn and the doors are windowless and armored; yet, the interior with its mosaic floors and marble reliefs exudes a sense of architectural pride. The building is scheduled for some improvements. 320 students attend the Wheatley School; 54% are Black, 18% are Hispanic, 17% are White and 12% are Asian. 72 of these students, or 23%, are classified for some level of special education classes. 77% of the Wheatley's students take the mandated Metropolitan Achievement Tests. The Wheatley students are improving according to recent Boston Public School reports. The 1985 scores indicated that students were averaging scores in the 41st percentile in Reading and the 46th percentile in

Math; the 1988 scores indicate that students in grades 6, 7 and 8 scored in the 53rd, 35th and 41st percentiles in Reading and the 53rd, 35th and 41st percentiles in Math respectively. In 1988 83% of the students were promoted.

The improvement of the students' test scores is a high priority for the school's principal, Michael Anderson, who was appointed in 1988. Anderson replaced a veteran principal, whose tenure had reportedly resulted in chaos in the school. When Anderson first arrived after serving as an assistant principal at South Boston High School, he "saw a great need for order." He established a simple discipline code which included silent filing in the corridors and a "tell-don't-yell" protocol for solving problems with among students and between students and teachers. Anderson believes that if students have some guidelines for behavior that they will become better problem-solvers and communicators. Teaching these things is a struggle, he reports, but it is the key to creating a middle school environment where students are "nurtured and treated like people and where they begin to realize that hard work can have lasting positive effects in human relations." Anderson works on this philosophy by being in the corridors at all class changes to compliment students for their silence and to greet students individually as a sign of concern. He wants his teachers and students to see him as someone who cares about learning and a positive school climate and, with a great deal of nervous, physical energy, he visits their classrooms, and is present in the cafeteria and at school activities.

School Organization and Goals. Anderson convened a committee of staff, parents and community members to help him assess the needs of the school in 1988. They concluded that students at the Wheatley had many needs, some due to a disorganized plan of instruction. Anderson "knew he had good teachers"

so he constructed a new cluster schedule which would allow the teachers to develop lessons which were centered on improving students' basic skills. The cluster model also gives teachers common planning time when they can talk to each other daily about their work. Anderson meets with each cluster team of teachers once a week as an advisor. He claims that this activity gives him "insight into the teachers' concerns and problems and helps teachers to focus on what they are actually doing professionally in the classroom." Anderson is assisted by one assistant principal and one director of instruction. Both of these people, according to the principal, "help to assess the total school program and the climate at the Wheatley, so that school improvement can be successful." Anderson's teaching staff is comprised of 24 regular education teachers, 3 special education teachers, 2 Chapter I teachers and 1 instructional support teacher. A teacher-on-assignment from the district serves as the school's full-time guidance counselor and registrar. Other professional staff includes a part-time school nurse, a part-time evaluation team leader and a full-time school librarian. Support staff includes 2 teacher aides, 1 part-time and 1 full-time custodian, 1 secretary, 4 cafeteria workers and 1 full-time school policeman.

Getting to know his teachers through the team meetings has helped Anderson to schedule teachers according to their strengths. For example, since seventh grade is the year when many students were failing at the Wheatley, he assigned "his best teachers" to the seventh grade cluster with the hope that their ability to work together and, their creativity as teachers would turn the tide of failure this June. In addition to scheduling changes, Anderson has initiated school-wide, silent-sustained reading for

fifteen minutes at the end of each day. He is also in the process of evaluating all the special projects and events which teachers and students have participated in during the past few years. While he finds these projects valuable--they range from field trips to assemblies--he believes that "there have been too many interruptions in the students' overall instruction" which may explain some of the poor test scores. For example, Anderson noted that the spring months included some weeks when students were missing from classes for field trips up to two days per week. In the coming year Anderson will ask his teachers to plan a year-long calendar which will include special events but which will be coordinated more closely to the goal of promoting students' academic achievement.

While Anderson centers his energy on instructional issues, he relies heavily on, Bob Forbes, his director of instruction, to help teachers address other student needs. According to Anderson, Forbes' fifteen years of experience "has helped him to establish strong links with community agencies which can be mobilized to help students with special academic or personal needs." Largely, these services have been delivered through the city and state Departments of Social Services.

The Boston Plan for Excellence. The Wheatley has also been a yearly recipient of monies from the Boston Plan for Excellence. The Wheatley has used HEART monies to buy a VCR for an integrated learning program in 1988--89. In 1989--90 the HEART fund will support Anderson's plan to buy teacher aids and supplies to help improve math skills. He has developed a program to "gear up students in their math skills" and the grant will allow him to purchase new manipulatives and hand-held computers which students, teachers and parents can use to reinforce students' math skills.

Business Collaboration. The Eliot Bank, a relatively small financial institution in downtown Boston, has been Wheatley's business partner for two years. Pat McSweeney, the vice-president for human resources at the bank, has worked with Anderson and Forbes in planning what the partnership will mean to both parties. All three say that they want the partnership to be a "mutual relationship" where both the bank and the school will reap some benefits. This common goal has led them to develop a three-year planning schedule; the bank and the school personnel are "talking about partnership ideas" according to Anderson, "which can have a lasting effect on both institutions."

This, however, doesn't mean that there hasn't been anything occurring in the partnership thus far. To date, "bonding is happening." The Eliot Bank has supplied judges for the school's fashion show in Home economics class, the students' art show has been displayed in the downtown Bank, and student artists, their teachers and parents were feted at a special art show reception at the Bank. The Bank has also supplied funds for incentive awards for math and reading achievement and for seedlings which are being grown in science classes and which will be planted on the school's grounds this spring. The Bank "likes Anderson's philosophy of teaching the whole student" according to McSweeney and the Bank, also, likes the academic focus which Anderson has brought to the school this year. As both parties plan the future of the partnership, they are happy to endorse any effort which somehow brings Bank employees and students and teachers together initially before any major cooperative programs can be planned.

One interesting contribution which the bank has made to the school is the translation of the school newspaper. The newspaper is written in English, a

factor which has meant that Chinese and Spanish-speaking students and parents, who number 30% of the enrollment, have often disregarded the news from the school. The Bank has allowed the students to run the paper through its multi-lingual FAX machine which provides quick translation and printing of the now multi-lingual paper. Efforts like this suggest that communication is occurring between the bank and the school. They are patient partners; the bank staff are not starry-eyed about their plans to help the Wheatley nor is the school asking the bank to come through with any great wish-list of money. What is occurring is more right now parallels the initiation stage of a friendship and according to McSweeney, "that is the best place to start because no one is forcing anyone to feel obligated to do anything and yet, communication is open."

Sources in Boston speak warmly about the Wheatley School as a place where "kids are good." This suggests that the school has a fighting chance for improvement as a positive learning environment for some of Roxbury's poorest youngsters.

IV. School and District Performance Data: 1985 and 1988

People in Boston who know middle schools believe that many do a far better job of responding to their students needs than they did just a few years earlier. However, the middle schools as a group still are not highly regarded. Many people think that their improvements have been largely cosmetic or overstated; others believe that while some progress has been made in some schools, most still have a great distance to go.

In this section of the report, we look at various measures of performance in the seven middle schools we studied and in the Boston middle schools as a group. There are limitations to analyses of this sort as definitive statements on school performance, particularly in areas of academic achievement. For one thing, quantitative measures do not account for differences between the skills and knowledge of students and teaching staffs at different schools, which influence annual progress. These analyses become more questionable when the data are used to compare schools. Moreover, data on student achievement may not measure the effects of new programs which have not been in place long enough to have a measurable impact on students skills, what they know, and their ability to think critically. Indeed, the impact of some worthy programs may not be measurable by the usual quantitative indicators. Quantitative measures are also influenced by changes in the curriculum, school principals and some school or district policies.

Our research was not sufficiently fine-grained to compare changes in school context to performance outcomes. Despite these limitations, however, this data does provide a rough measure of how schools perform relative to other middle schools in the system, and it provides information on performance trends.

In the following pages, data on student achievement, attendance, suspensions, promotions and dropping out is reviewed for 1984-1985 and 1987-1988 in the seven middle schools we studied and in the full group of 22 middle schools.[1] We also note changes in the percentage of students by school who took the Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT).

Student Achievement. Figures 1 and 2 present 1985 and 1988 data on student performance by grade in each school and for all district middle schools on the reading and math sections of the MAT. The average of reading scores in the seven schools declined by 4.1 percentile points from 51.5th percentile to 47.4th percentile between 1985 and 1988. Reading achievement scores dropped over the three year period in six of the seven schools. By contrast, all middle schools in the district registered a 6 percentile point decline in reading achievement, from 51 to 45th percentile.

Performance on the math section of the MAT showed a similar downward turn in middle schools across the district, from the 59th percentile to the 50th percentile. In the seven middle schools, math achievement declined in five and rose in two of the schools. In the Timilty and the Wheatly Schools, performance rose from 41 to 59 and 44 to 48 percentile points respectively. In the other five schools, math scores declined by an average of 4.8 points from 50.4 to 45.6 percentile.

Percent of Students Taking the Test. In six of the seven schools, there was a decline in the percentage of students who took the MAT. In one school, the Lewenberg, participation increased from 40.4% in 1985 to 41% in 1988. But on average, 63.7 % of the students in these seven schools were tested in 1985; by 1988, the number had declined to 54.3%, for a net decline

of 9.4% in three years. Across all schools in the district, the percent of test takers declined by 4%, from 81% in 1985 to 77% in 1988.

These figures on test taking appear to reflect the actual number of students who took the test, rather than those who are eligible, which would be somewhat higher. But the surprisingly low percentage of test takers in the seven middle schools -- all but one fell below the district average which we estimate at 65-70% -- appears to reflect the large number of students who are enrolled in special education or bilingual programs in these schools. We do not have data on the numbers of SPED and bilingual students in the seven schools, but a reasonable close estimate can be found simply by looking at the number of "regular" students who were tested in 1985 and 1988 (Figure 3).

The National Center for Policy Research in Education has found in an as-yet unpublished study of six states that special education placement and retention in bilingual programs has increased substantially since recent state education reform efforts began tightening standards and introducing high-stakes standardized testing programs. Since Boston introduced its new promotion gates policy within the past three years, the increase in special placement students might well be a school response to the new policy. Special students are not required to take the tests and their scores are not included in computations of school averages or used for promotions. Special education placements across the district have increased. At the same time, the influx of bilingual students to Boston has increased in recent years and may help to explain the three year rise in bilingual enrollments from 12% in 1985 to 15% in 1988.

Attendance. Figure 4 reports the average percent of students attending school each day for each of the seven middle schools and for all middle schools in 1985 and 1988. Average attendance is up very slightly in four of the schools, while the other three show declines of under 1% over the three year period. On average, attendance in the seven schools stood at 88.2% in 1985 and 88.9% in 1988. This compares to district middle school averages of 91.3% and 89.2% respectively, indicating a decline in daily attendance of 2.1%.

Boston also reports attendance figures for chronically truant students who are absent more than 15% of the school year. Figure 5 reports those rates for the seven schools and the district. These figures were up slightly in two schools, and down in five, with average number of students in this category declining from 23.2% to 20.8%. The district reports that 24.4% of all middle school students were absent more than 15% of the school year in 1985, and that the figure improved to 19.9% in 1988. Since student attendance has a strong, inverse correlation to dropping out of school, reductions in the numbers of students absent more than 15% of the time is a good sign that progress is being made with youngsters who are most at-risk of early school leaving. However, the decline in average attendance for all students in the middle schools points to the need to broaden the scope of dropout prevention efforts beyond the 20-odd% who are most at risk.

Promotion. Promotion rates have increased in all but one of the seven schools, which registered a very slight decline. Comparative figures for 1985 and 1988 are shown in Figure 6. Average promotion rates in the seven schools registered a ten percentile point increase from 78.7% in 1985 to 88.6% in

1988. Across middle schools in the district, promotion rates have improved on average from 83.1% in 1985 to 87.7% in 1988.

These figures are an encouraging sign of progress toward uncoupling promotion rates from school attendance rates, which have been declining district-wide in the middle schools. However it is not clear why or how promotion rates have risen as attendance, on which course grades are ultimately based, have declined. This issue deserves further analysis.

Suspensions from School. Suspension rates in all district middle schools are down by a single percentage point to 9% over the 1985 to 1988 three year period. In our study's seven middle schools, suspensions were down in three schools and increased in four. Average suspension rates went from 17.3% in 1985 to 11.8 % in 1988. See Figure 7 for a report on suspension rates by school and for the district.

The decline in district-wide suspension rates is a positive sign indicating that the research literature on school-related factors that influence dropout rates is being acted on. It is harder to understand the mixed results in our seven study schools. The King school increased its suspension rate from 10% to 33%, while the Timilty and Curley school rates declined from between 25 and 32 points. We can surmise that the schools have developed very different discipline codes or are implementing similar codes differently, but more analysis would be required to fully understand the distressing trend in the Curley Middle School and several others in the district. A year-to-year analysis per school would most likely provide better suspension data since Boston sources suggest that these reports are compiled in a variety of individual ways.

Drop-Out Rates. Middle Schools typically enroll students who are too young to legally dropout of school, but district retention policies nonetheless have resulted in a small but significant number of overage students (at least 16 years old) in these schools. We do not have a breakdown of the number of 16- years-plus student in each middle school, but we do know the number that dropped out in 1985 and 1988 as compared to the total number of students enrolled in each school. (Figures 8 and 9)

Across the district, an average of 4.8 students dropped out of all district middle schools in 1985; we do not know what the comparable number is for 1988. Since the major exodus from school occurs between the 9th and 12th grades, when most students have reached age 16, the figures on middle school dropout say little about district performance in this respect.

The picture of district middle school performance that emerges from these data is one of improvement in some areas -- notably in higher promotion rates, lower suspensions, and a decrease in the percent of chronically absent students -- but weaker performance in both reading and math achievement on the Metropolitan Achievement Test, a decline in the number of students enrolled in the regular curriculum and thus eligible to take the test, and a decline in average student attendance.

Average performance in the seven schools we looked at generally followed these trends, although declines were not as great. Reading scores declined by about 2/3 that of all district middle schools, and math scores fell by half. In areas where the district showed improvements, most of the seven schools improved by considerably more. For example, whereas promotion rates rose in all middle schools by 4.3% to 87.7% between 1985 and 1988, it rose by an average of 10% in six of the seven schools, to 88.6%. Attendance trends were

not parallel: while district rates dropped by 2% from 1985 to 1988, four of the seven schools showed improvements, while the remaining three declined by under 1%.

None of the seven schools improved across all the performance areas. However, the Timilty Middle School showed the greatest gains. The Timilty, which has been operating the extended day Project Promise program, was the only one to show a gain in reading achievement; it was up by 4 percentile points to 55th percentile. Timilty was also one of two schools showing improvements in math performance; its scores rose by 18 percentile points. The Timilty also had the highest promotion rate at 95.2%. and the second highest attendance rate of the seven schools, at 90.7%. However, attendance at the school had declined slightly over the three year period.

Statistical data from the other six schools show quite mixed results. Some schools improved considerably in two or three areas and fell back in the others in no discernible patterns. With the exception of the Timilty Middle School, the standard measures of school performance give little evidence of solid progress in the seven middle schools.

However the data does reveal performance progress in areas that are thought to influence school dropout rates; grade retention rates which are strongly correlated to early school leaving are down, as are district-wide middle school suspension rates in all middle schools and in four of the seven we studied. The most worrisome trends, however, are the declines in student attendance and performance on the MAT. The only explanation we found for the latter was the reforming of the MAT tests in 1986, which produced test score declines district wide, and the use of two different test forms in the 1985 and 1988 testing programs.

V. Prospects for Improving the Middle Schools

It is hard to imagine an urban school district in America that has as many conditions to support educational change as Boston has. For the past seven years, tremendous momentum for educational improvement has expanded to include virtually all major sectors of the city: the business community, the mayor's office, the Boston teachers' union, the Massachusetts Governor's office and the State Department of Education, most colleges and universities in the city, and local foundations. Together they have poured millions of dollars into the Boston Public Schools and have made a dazzling array of resources available to schools and students: college scholarships and jobs; pro bono teacher training; curriculum development help; discretionary funds for special projects; volunteer services; and political support from the highest reaches to bring pressure and resources to bear on improving district governance and school performance.

At the same time, education advocacy organizations such as the Massachusetts Advocacy Center and business-based groups such as the Boston Private Industry Council and the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston have undertaken a massive and highly successful efforts to better inform Boston citizens about the conditions of their public schools. Active support for education reform from organizations throughout the city combined with greatly improved public knowledge about of the problems of the schools has created a context for school reform that is unlike that in any other major U.S. city.

At the same time, the district and its middle schools in particular have several organizational and structural features that can help school improvement. The number of middle schools in the district is small enough to enable principals or other staff to collaborate in designing their own middle

schools agenda or in simply sharing information. Even more important, the schools are quite small -- the average enrollment is 470 -- so the possibilities are good for creating a secure and highly personalized learning environment.

In addition, Boston's middle schools, like its high schools, are abundantly staffed with certified, non-teaching personnel. The Lavenberg Middle School, for example, with an enrollment of 485 students, has a staff of 70, of which 40 are classroom teachers and 12 serve as administrators, counselors, and full-time cluster leaders. Much of the work of the non-teaching professionals is highly specialized, focusing on curriculum support or counseling for bilingual students, for example. Their work does not appear to be formally coordinated and overlapping responsibilities are common. The potential for using the non-teaching professional in creative and highly coordinated ways apparently has not been tapped. But the existence of these staff in the middle schools provides them with an uncommon human resource whose work could be redesigned to benefit the school in a number of ways.

Finally, there are several middle schools that are implementing school-wide programs focused on reading or math that could serve as models for adoption by other schools if proven effective. Unfortunately, none but Project Promise have thus far been carefully evaluated, although the Boston Plan for Excellence is seeking support to commission external evaluations of the HEART projects. The spread of new programs and ideas between the schools has taken place to some extent; the Compact Ventures program has spawned a number of middle school cluster projects and teacher teaming is increasing as well. There is enough diversity and innovation in the middle schools to provide models that might be worth replicating within the system. But

rigorous evaluations will have to be done as a first step before encouraging replication.

In many respects, then, Boston provides fertile ground for middle school improvement. It has widespread support for change, schools that are small enough to lend themselves to change, and resources for innovation. But the district and schools also present formidable barriers to change. One is the lack of direction or leadership for change from the superintendent's office, which has experienced considerable turn-over in the past decade. Superintendents have offered various platforms for change, but none has been unable to build a consensus around him ideas before a new administration with new plans replaces him. The district's inability to develop and sustain a program for long-term change has left the schools rudderless and almost exclusively dependent on the principal's knowledge and ideas for improvement programs.

The middle schools are also hampered by the absence of serious and sustained staff development in the district. Consequently, principals can't implement instructional programs that differ to any significant extent from practices that are familiar to local teachers. Practices advocated for middle schools such as student advisories, team teaching, or reading instruction require skills not commonly found in middle school teachers' repertoires, nor are they skills that easily can be added. Until the district makes a serious commitment to long-term staff development, many innovations -- perhaps including the newly proposed district de-centralization plan -- will be beyond the middle schools' grasp.

Several current district policies also impede improvement, such as the new promotion policy and an emerging accountability system that places excessive

emphasis on improvements in standardized test scores. While gains in achievement are undeniably important, the district's tendency to judge school performance chiefly on test results encourages teachers to teach to the test. It does not encourage them to develop students' analytic and critical thinking skills or to spend class time reading books that are not articulated to the district testing program.

Finally, the staff in many middle schools are highly balkanized, each concentrating their services on special segments of the population rather than coordinating services and providing them across the student body as a whole. The chief consequence of uncoordinated service delivery is the unequal distribution of resources, such that some children receive multiple services while others receive none. We use the term services in its broadest sense to mean personal attention, caring adults who take the time to know students and their families, attention to the whole child rather than to a diagnosed problem. As mentioned earlier, schools are sufficiently staffed with professional personnel to ensure that no one falls through the cracks. But staff resources must to be reorganized and redeployed to meet the needs of all youngsters in the schools.

One of the great puzzles of school reform in Boston is why the system has been so resistant to change given the great financial, technical and moral support that it receives from the community. We believe that some of the inability to improve Boston schools in this environment is due to community and business resources that are misplaced or not well used. The business community has been extremely generous to students and schools. But very few of its resources have been targeted on the district's most critical education problems. Jobs, college scholarships and career education programs are no

doubt important for many students. But schools don't improve because of jobs or scholarships; they need support to re-train an aging teacher force; to provide reading programs that work across the district; and to systematically address other major educational deficiencies in the system. Business resources applied to those problems might well yield progress in the schools.

At the same time, there are no promises that a redistribution of business and community resources could solve the woes of Boston schools. The problems of education in our biggest cities have been under steady attack for nearly three decades now, and much research has been focused on finding solutions. But no one yet knows with confidence what will improve urban schools or how to begin the process. Proposals for decentralization and accountability are at the forefront now. But it remains to be seen whether these latest ideas will finally address the central academic problems of the schools.

Endnotes

1. Letter from S. Bing, Executive Director and A. Wheelock, Policy Analyst, Mass. Advocacy Center to J. Rasso, Manager, Compact Ventures Program, May 15, 1989.

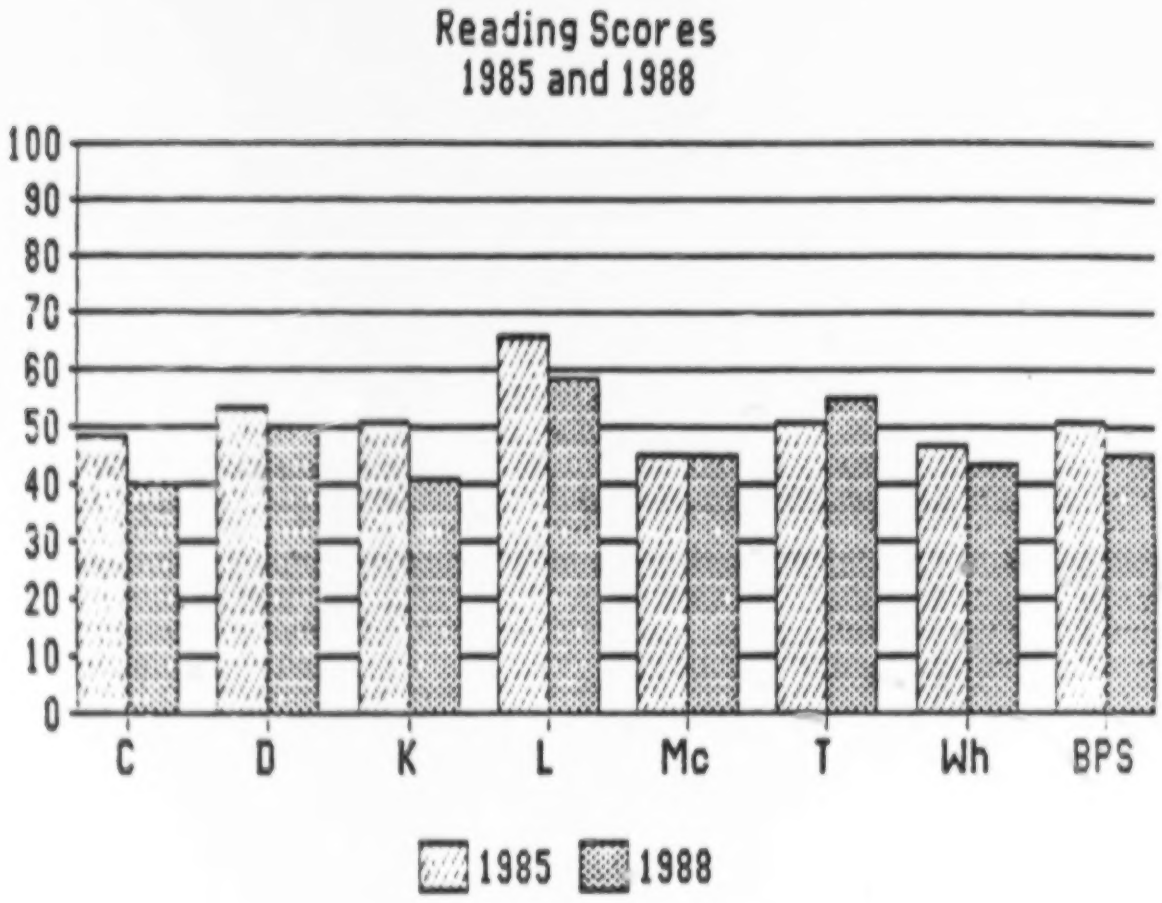
2. Letter from M. Godfrey, Regional Center Director, Mass. Department of Education to L. Wilson, Superintendent, Boston Public Schools, April 13, 1989.

3. Superintendent's Recommendations Concerning Middle Schools and High Schools, The Boston Education Plan, May 12, 1989, pages unnumbered.

4. "Group disputes report on longer school hours," by Gloria Negri, The Boston Globe, June 16, 1987.

5. The data we use in the preceding pages was taken from School Profiles 1984-85, Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, August 1986, and School Profiles 1987-88, Boston Public Schools, Office of Research and Development, 1988.

Figure 1



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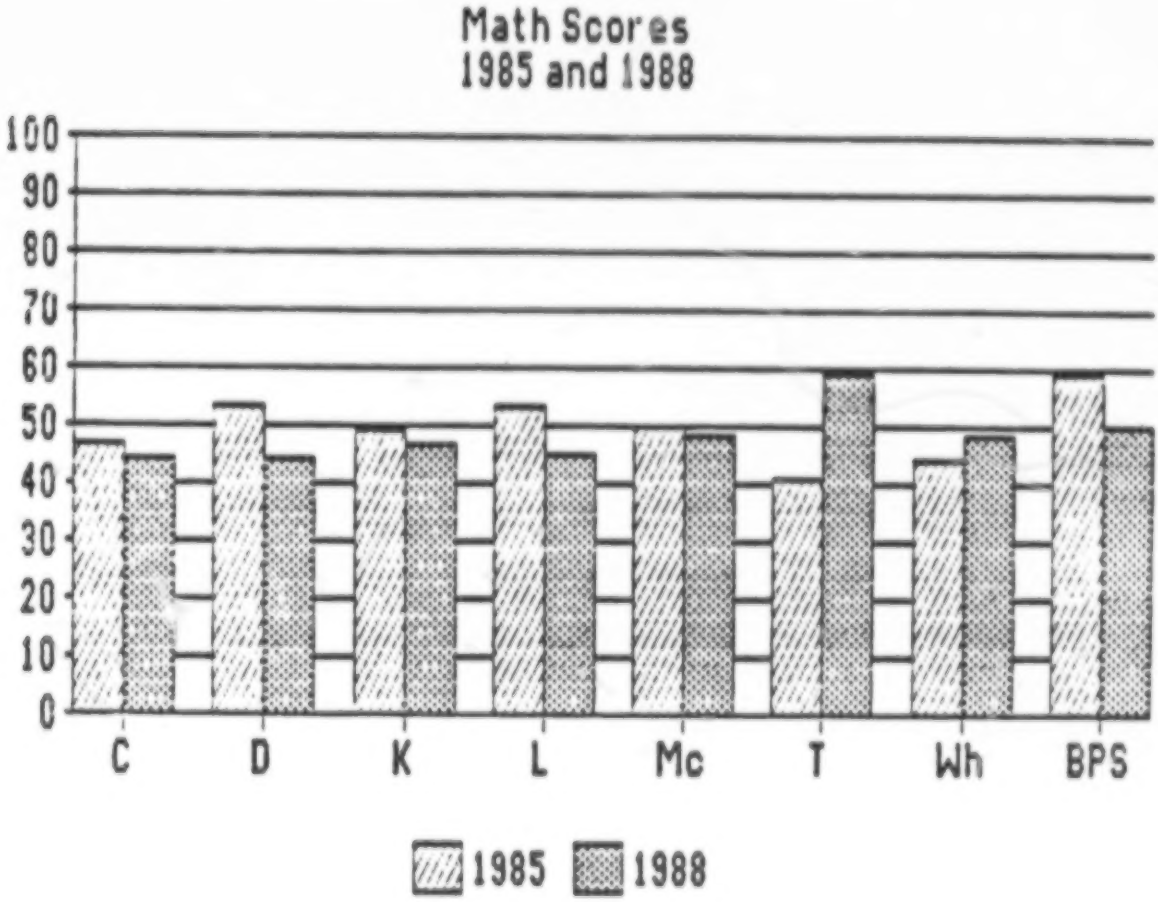
D - Deaborne
K - King
L - Lewenberg
Mc - McCormack
T - TImilty
Wh - Wheatley
BPS - Boston Public Schools (middle schools)

Figure 2



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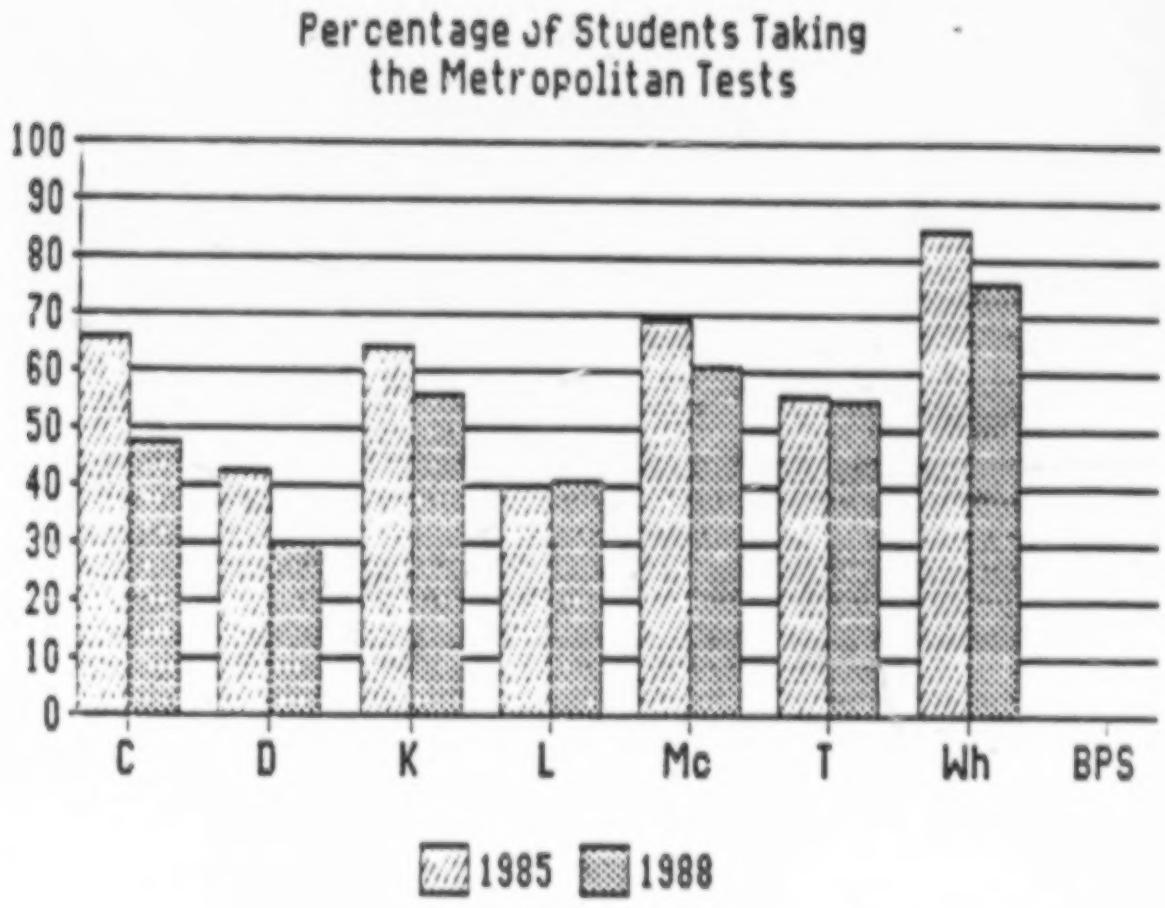

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Figure 4

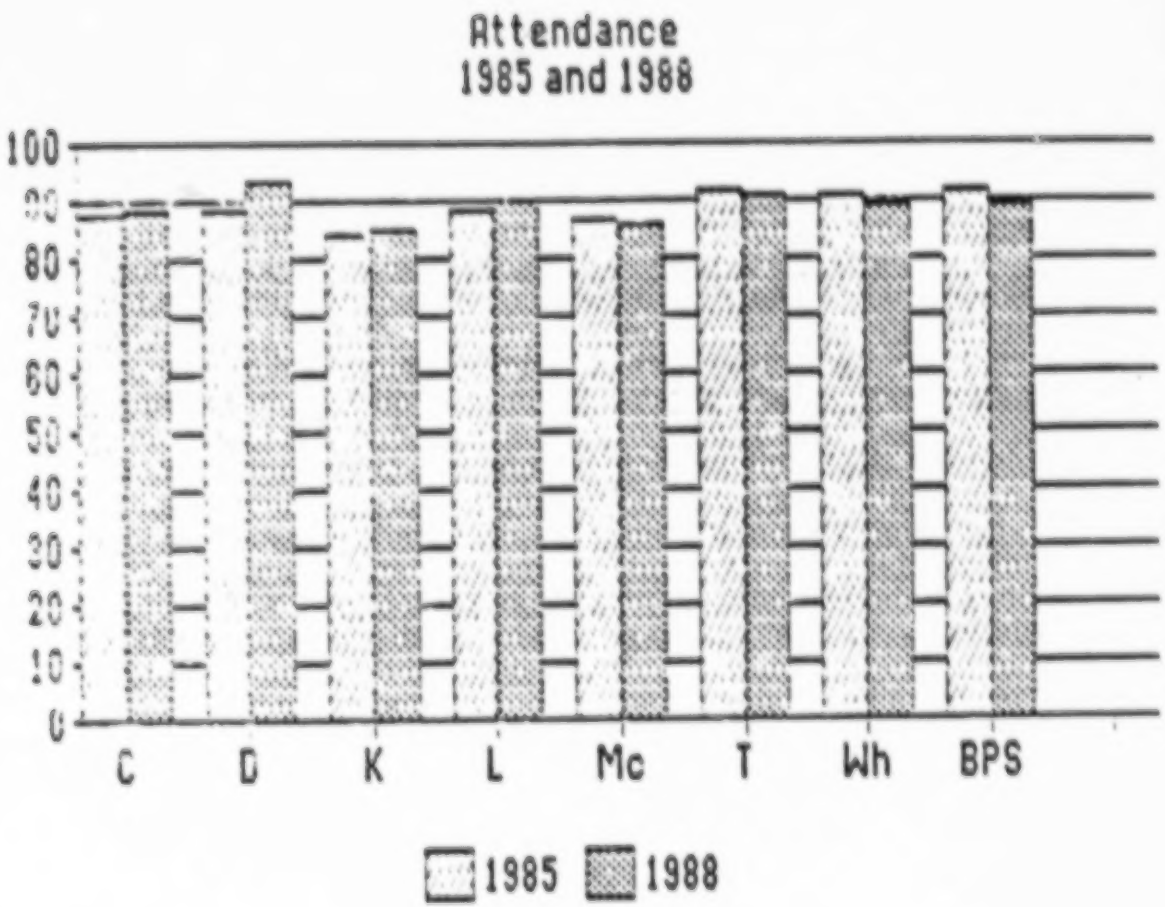

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Figure 5.

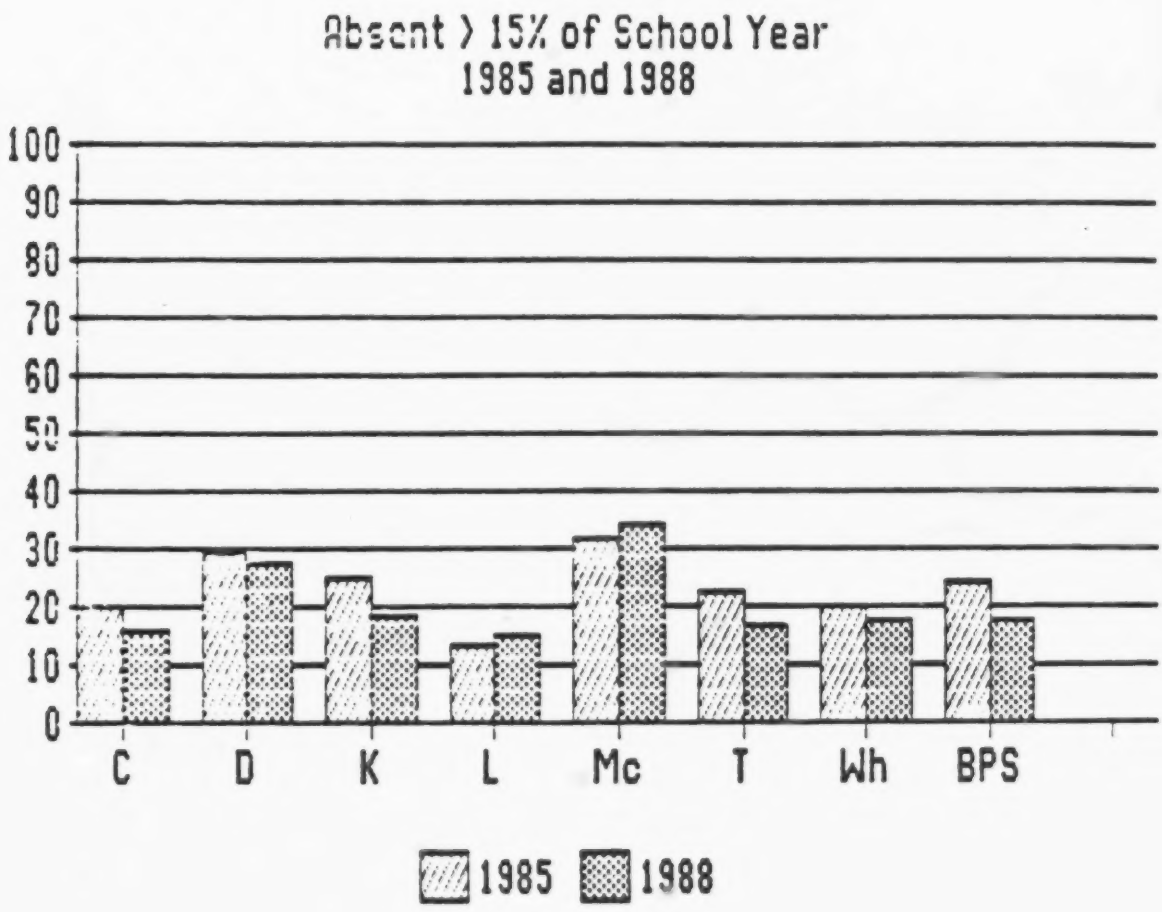

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Figure 6

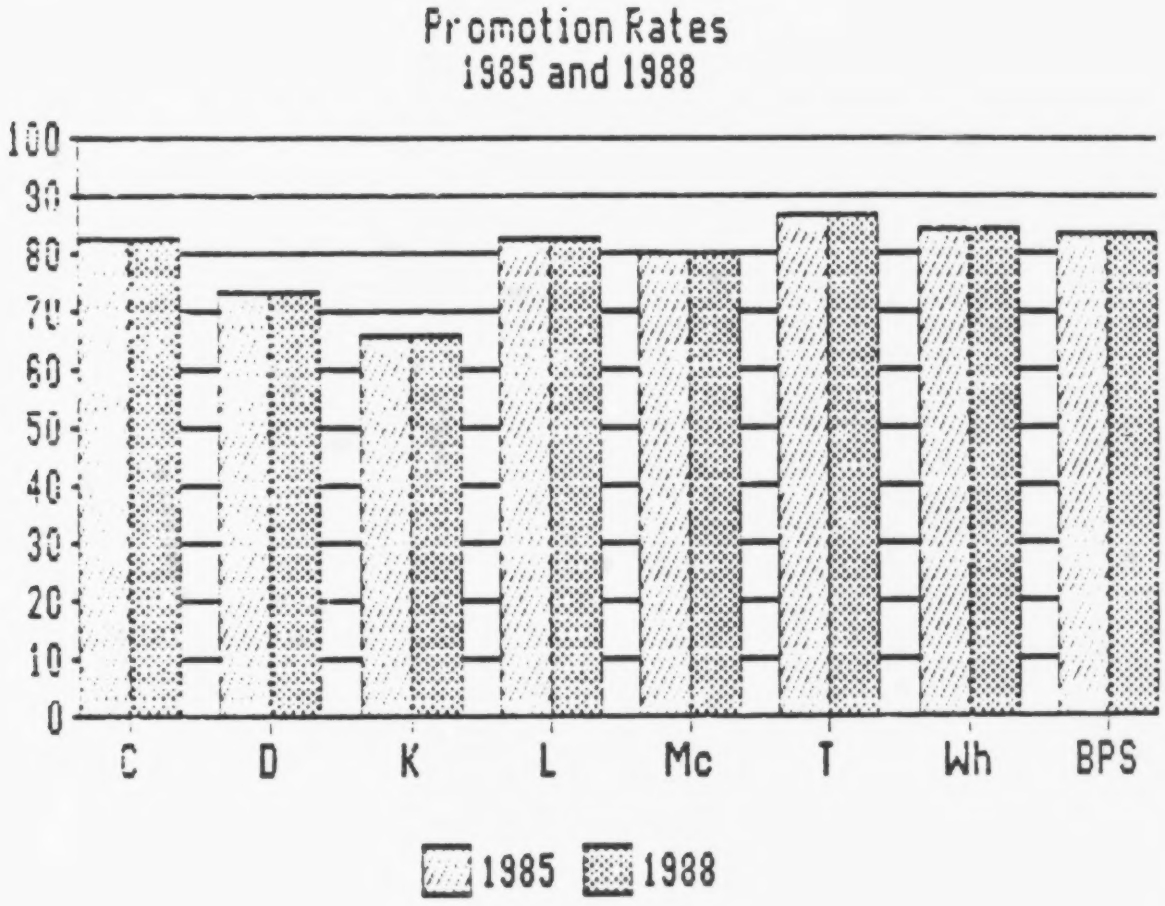

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Figure 7

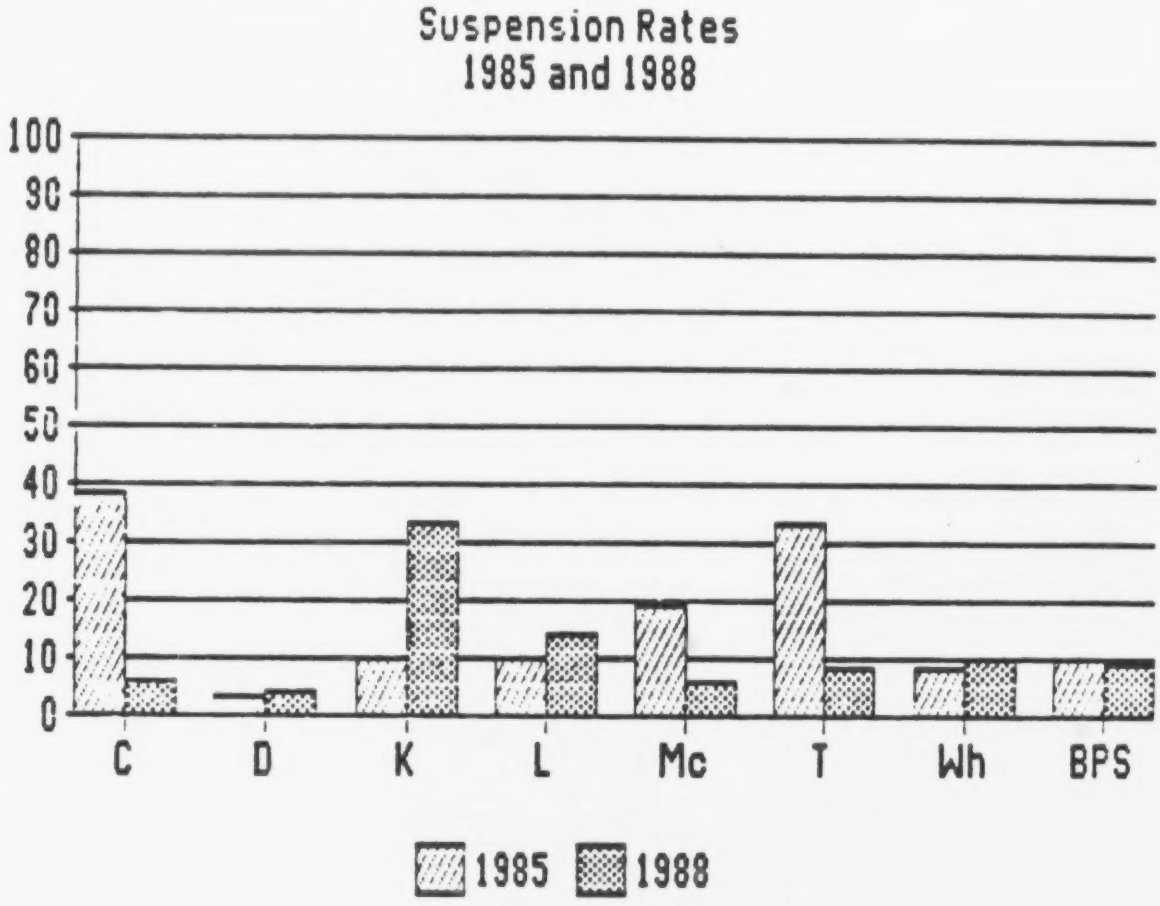

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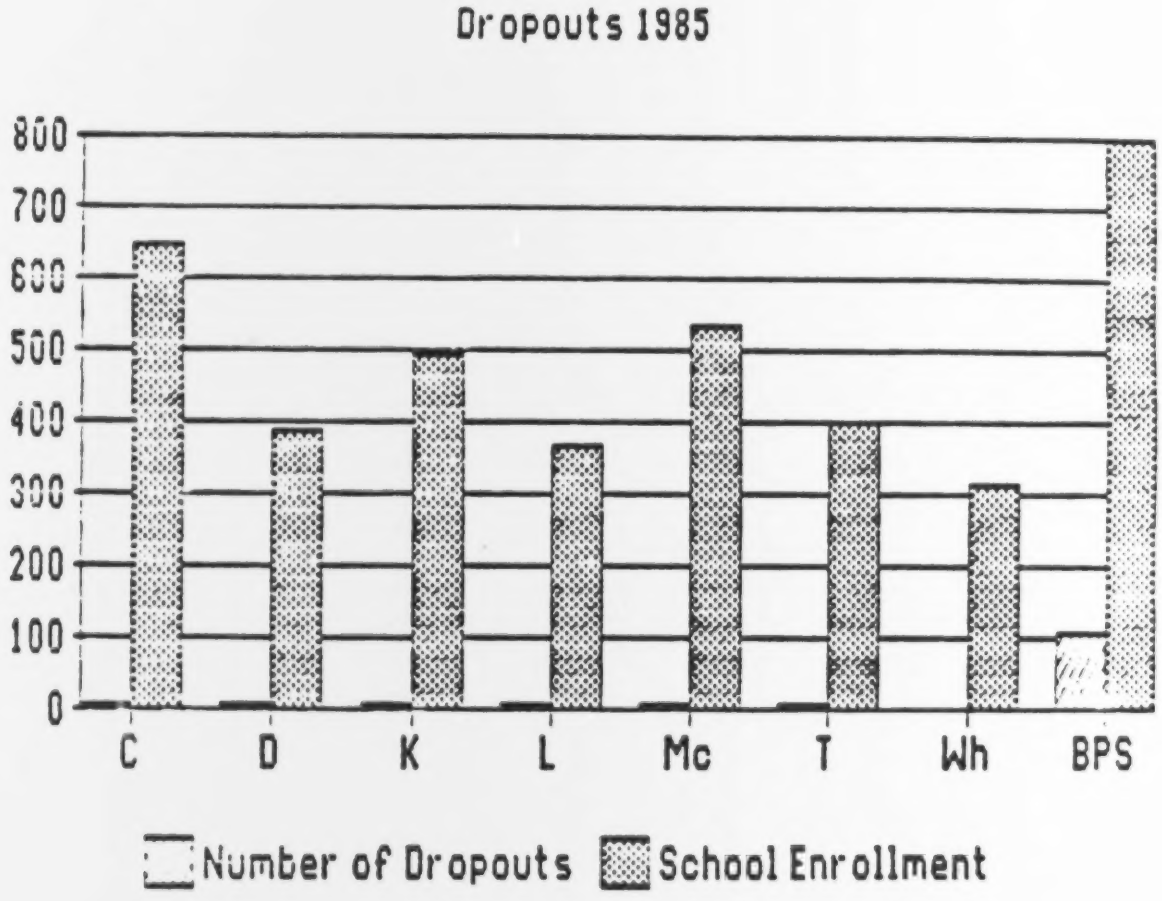
Figure 8



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